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RECOLLECTIONS

OF A

LITERARY MAN

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A LITERARY MAN

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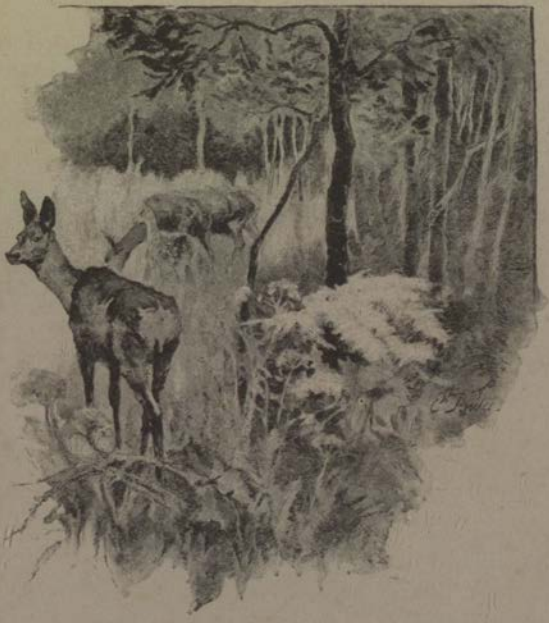
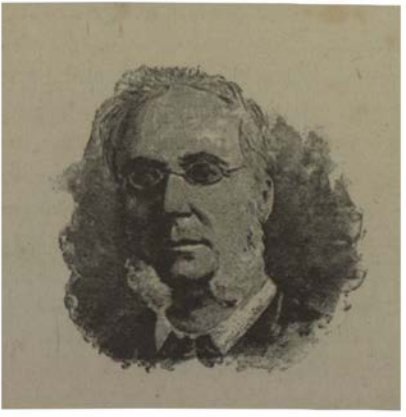


"SUMMER PALACES."



EMILE OLLIVIER.

Among all the Paris salons, haunted by that first dress coat of mine, the salon Ortolan, at the *Ecole de Droit,* has left one of the pleasantest impressions. Old Ortolan, a shrewd meridional and famous jurisconsult, was also a poet in his leisure moments. He had published *Les Enfantines,* and although he swore he wrote only for children, he did not disdain the approbation of grown-up people for his verses. Thus his soirées, much frequented by members of the learned frater-

nity, presented an agreeable and original medley of pretty women, professors, lawyers, learned men, and poets. It was in the capacity of poet that I was invited. Amid the young and antique celebrities who passed before me, in the golden mist of my first dazzled bewilderment, was Emile Ollivier. He was with his wife, the first one, and the great musician Liszt, his father-in-law. Of the wife, I recall only a vision of fair hair above a velvet bodice; of Liszt, the Liszt of those days, I remember still less. I had neither eyes nor curiosity for any one but Ollivier. At this time (it was in 1858), about thirty-three years old, leader of the most popular party among the youthful republicans who were proud to have a chief of his age, he was in the full glare of glory. The story of his family passed from mouth to mouth; the old father for a long time banished, the brother fallen in a duel, he himself pro-consul at twenty, and governing Marseilles by sheer eloquence. All this invested him from afar, in the minds of men, with a certain air of Roman or Greek tribune, and even with some resemblance to the tragic young leaders of the great Revolution, Saint-Just, Desmoulins,

or Danton. Taking myself but scant interest in politics, I could not help comparing him —in seeing him thus, poetic notwithstanding his spectacles, eloquent, Lamartinian, always quick to emotion and to speech—to one of the trees of his country—not that of which he bore the name, and which is the emblem of wisdom, but to one of those pines which harmoniously crown the white hilltops, and are reflected in the blue waters of Provençal shores; barren trees indeed, but enfolding within them a faint echo of the lyre of antiquity, and always quivering, always filled with the sound of their countless tiny needles, intermingling and clashing at the lightest breath of the tempest, at the faintest breeze that crosses over from Italy.

Emile Ollivier was at that time "*one of the Five*": one of the five deputies who, alone, dared to defy the Empire, and he towered among them, on the top benches of the Assembly, isolated in his opposition as upon an impregnable Aventine. Opposite to him, lying back in the Presidential armchair, was Morny, who, under a lazy, sleepy air, watching him with the cold keen eye of a connoisseur of human nature, adjudged him to be less

Roman than Greek, more carried away by an Athenian frivolity than weighted with the cold logic and prudence of the Latin. He knew the vulnerable spot; he saw that beneath the toga of the tribune nestled the innate and defenceless vanity of the virtuoso and the poet, and by this he hoped one day to gain him over.

Years later, when for the second time, and under circumstances I am now about to relate, I again met Emile Ollivier, he had been won over to the Empire. Before dying, it had become an absolute point of coquetry with Morny, by dint of bantering advances and haughty cajolery, to overcome the resistance, made for form's sake and the lookers-on only, of that melodious vanity. They had cried in the streets: "the horrible treason of Emile Ollivier," and because of that, Emile Ollivier fancied himself a second Mirabeau. It was Mirabeau's endeavour that the Revolution and the Monarchy should walk hand in hand; Ollivier, full of the very best intentions, attempted, after twenty years, to unite Liberty to the Empire, and his efforts recalled Phrosine marrying the Adriatic to the Sultan. In the meantime, failing the Sultan, and as

he had himself long been a widower, he re-married, a quite young girl, a native of Provence like himself, who admired him. He was said to be radiantly triumphant; one and the same honeymoon gilding with softest rays at once his love and his political career. Happy man!

But a pistol shot resounded from the neighbourhood of Auteuil. Pierre Bonaparte had just killed Victor Noir; and this Corsican bullet, as it passed through the chest of a young man, struck to the heart the fiction of a liberal Empire. Paris rose in a moment; there was loud talking in the cafés, a gesticulating crowd on the pavements. From minute to minute fresh news arrived, fresh reports were circulated; stories were handed about of the extraordinary arrangements of Prince Pierre's establishment, that house at Auteuil, jealously closed to the bustle of Paris life, like the fortress palace of some Genoese or Florentine noble, smelling of powder and fire-arms, and resounding all day with the noise of pistol practice and the click of crossed swords. The talk was of Victor Noir, his gentleness, his youth, his approaching marriage! Then the women

began to take a part; they pitied the mother, the *fiancée;* and the sentimentalism of a love affair became mingled with the rancour of politics. The *Marseillaise*, with a huge black border, published an appeal to arms; and people said that in the evening, Rochefort would distribute four thousand revolvers at his newspaper office. Two hundred thousand men, women and children; the bourgeois quarter, all the faubourgs, were preparing for the great manifestation of the morrow; there was a breath of coming barricades in the air, and in the melancholy of the fading day were heard those indistinct sounds, precursors of revolutions, which seem to be the first low warning cracks of the foundations of a throne.

At this moment, I met a friend on the boulevard. "Things are going badly," I said to him. "Very badly in truth, and the most idiotic part of the business is, that in 'high places' there is not the faintest notion of the gravity of the situation." Then, slipping his arm within mine: "Emile Ollivier knows you," he added; "come with me to the Place Vendôme."

From the moment that Emile Ollivier

entered its doors, the ministry of justice had lost every characteristic of pomp and administrative haughtiness. Putting into actual practice, his dream of a democratic and liberal Empire, in true American Senator fashion Ollivier had been unwilling to inhabit those vast apartments, those lofty saloons, decorated with bees, stamped and overladen, according to his views, with too much autocratic gilding. He still occupied, in the Rue Saint-Guillaume, his modest barrister's chambers, and came every morning to the Place Vendôme in his frock-coat and spectacles, carrying a great portfolio stuffed with papers under his arm, like any other man of business on his way to the Law Courts, or like an honest clerk who reaches his office on foot. For this he was somewhat looked down upon by the ushers and lacqueys. The door was wide open, the staircase deserted! Ushers and lacqueys allowed us to pass, not even deigning to ask where we were going, or of whom we were in search; merely testifying, by an air of disdainful resignation, and a certain insolent correctness of attitude, how novel and familiar these manners and customs appeared to them, and

how contrary to the splendid and distant traditions of an ideal administration.

In a large study, with lofty ceiling, lighted by two vast French windows, the minister stood alone, leaning against the chimney-piece, at his post, in the attitude of an orator, —it was one of those offices of gloomy and melancholy aspect, wherein all is green, of that bureaucratic green peculiar to leathern chairs and green portfolios, which bears the same relation to the beautiful green of the forest, as a stamped law-paper to a sonnet written on vellum, or as cider to champagne. Night was closing in, and flunkeys brought in great lighted lamps.

My friend had spoken truly, no one in this region, suspected anything amiss; the noises of the streets are but indistinct by the time they reach these heights. Emile Ollivier, with natural infatuation, added to the short-sighted vision which characterizes the man in power, declared to us that all was going on well, that he was perfectly well informed; he even showed us the note written by Pierre Bonaparte to M. Conti, which had just been handed to him, a note written in savage and feudal terms, quite in

the Italian traditions of the sixteenth century, which began thus: "Two young fellows came to challenge me," and concluded with

these words: "I believe I have killed one of them."

Then I spoke in my turn, and I related what I believed to be the truth, speaking, not as a politician, but as a man, explaining

the effervescence of all spirits, the exasperation of the street populace, the inevitable alternative between recourse to arms and a courageous act of justice. I added that Fonvielle and Noir certainly seemed to me, as to all others, incapable of any idea or wish of killing, or even striking a blow, at the Prince in his own house; that I knew them well, Noir in particular, and how warm was my liking for this great harmless boy, still almost a child, surprised himself at his success in Paris, and proud of his precocious fame; seeking by hard work to gain all that was yet lacking to him in elementary education, and whose greatest joy had been to learn from a friend some short Latin quotation, with the manner in which it should be neatly introduced, apropos of any thing, into the conversation,—all in order to astonish, in the course of an evening's conversation, J.-J. Weiss, then on the staff of the *Journal de Paris*, who was teaching him to spell.

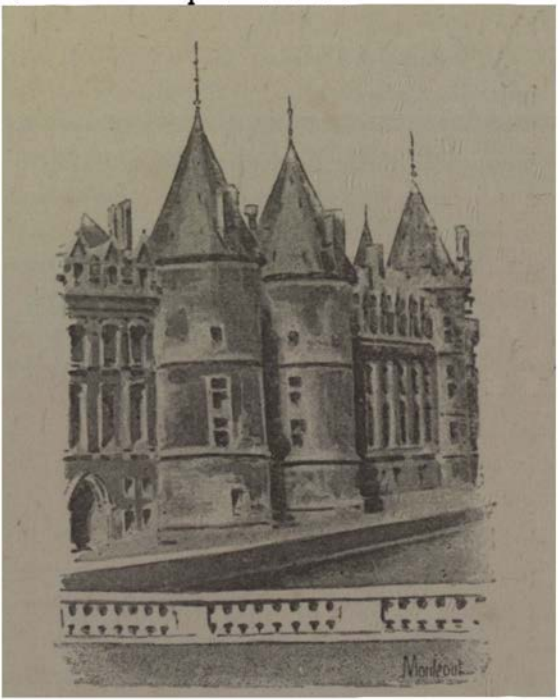
Emile Ollivier listened to me attentively, with a thoughtful and decided air; then when I had finished, he said, after a short silence, and in a proud tone, this phrase,

which I reproduce word for word: "Well, if Prince Pierre is an assassin, we will send him to the galleys!"

A Bonaparte to the galleys! That was indeed a phrase suited to the Keeper of the Seals of a liberal Empire, of a minister still hampered by the illusions of the orator, of a minister who bore the title of minister without possessing the spirit which should animate him, of a minister, in short, whose residence was in the Rue Saint-Guillaume!

On the morrow, it is true, Pierre Bonaparte was a prisoner, but prisoner only in the fashion in which princes are imprisoned; on the first floor of the *Tour d'Argent*, with a view over the Place du Châtelet and the Seine; and the Parisians who crossed the bridges could point out to each other his pretence of a dungeon, and the dainty muslin curtains of his scarcely barred windows. Some weeks later, Prince Pierre was solemnly acquitted by the High Court at Bourges. Emile Ollivier alluded no further to the galleys; but quitted once for all, the Rue Saint-Guillaume for the Place Vendôme. Henceforward, ushers and officials smiled ceremoniously as he passed;—he had become

a perfect minister of an Empire, and the day of a liberal Empire was over.



To sum up, he was but an indifferent statesman, full of impulse and devoid of reflexion; but withal an honest man, a poet full of ideals strayed into public business;

thus may Emile Ollivier be defined. Morny first of all, and then others after Morny, made a catspaw of him. While posing as a Republican, he attempted to consolidate the dynasty, by splashing over it a rough-cast of liberty; later on, he wished for peace, yet declared war,—not with an easy conscience, as by an unfortunate inspiration he declared, but in a hopelessly light and thoughtless spirit, dragging us with him into the abyss, from which we have emerged, while he remained lost in it!

The other evening,—sooner or later one always meets in Paris,—we dined opposite to each other at a friend's table; he was the same as ever; from behind the glasses of the spectacles, came the gaze of the dreamer, questioning and undecided as of yore; the same physiognomy, that of a speaker, where all lies confessed in the lines round the lips, the curve of the mouth, full of audacity, but without determination. Proud and upright still, but quite white; the thick hair, the short whiskers, all white,—white as an abandoned camp in a disastrous campaign lying under a pall of snow. With all this he had still the abrupt, nervous voice of those who hide

more trouble in their hearts than they are willing to allow the world to guess at.

And I called to memory the young tribune, black as a raven, of whom I had caught a glimpse in the salon of old Ortolan.

GAMBETTA.

One day, years and years ago, at a sumptuous banquet at two francs a head, Gambetta and Rochefort met at my table d'hôte at the Hotel du Sénat, of which I have already drawn you the picture—a tiny place at the end of a narrow courtyard, with a chilly and well-swept pavement, where oleanders and spindlewood pined in their classic green tubs. It sometimes happened that I thus invited a literary friend, the day after an article in the *Figaro* had brought me a smile from fortune; for it varied and freshened up our somewhat

provincial circle. Unhappily Gambetta and Rochefort were not intended by nature to harmonize, and I rather think that on this evening they did not speak a word to each other. I can see them now, one at each end, separated by the whole length of the table-cloth, and the same then as they ever remained: the one close, reserved, with dry laugh, between scarce opened lips, and rare gestures; the other laughing loudly, shouting, gesticulating, as heady and overflowing as a vat of Cahors wine. And what things, what events lay brooding, though no one dreamt of it, in the gulf between these two guests, sitting among the jugs of tar-water and napkin rings of a scanty student's dinner!

The Gambetta of that date was sowing his wild oats, and deafening all the cafés of the Quartier Latin with his stentorian loquacity. But, let there be no misunderstanding, the cafés of the Quartier at this time were not mere drinking-houses where thirst was assuaged, and where smoking could be indulged in. In the midst of a muzzled Paris without newspapers, and without public life, these meetings of studious and generous tempered youth, real schools of opposition, or

rather of legal resistance, had remained the only places where the voice of freedom could make itself heard. Every one of them had its own regular orator, and a table which became at certain moments almost a tribune, and each orator had in the Quartier his own admirers and partisans.

"At the *Voltaire* there is Larmina, who is powerful. By Jove! he *is* powerful, that Larmina at the *Voltaire*."

"I don't deny it; but at the *Procope*, there is Pesquidoux, who is even more powerful."

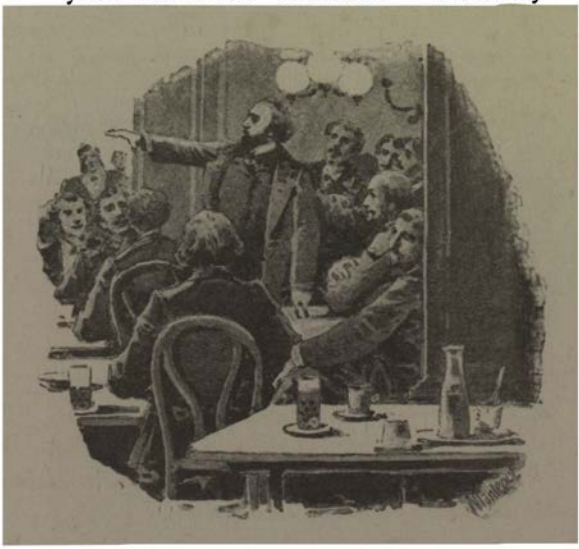
And then, banded together, a pilgrimage would be made to the *Voltaire*, to hear Larmina; then to the *Procope* to listen to Pesquidoux, with the simple, ardent faith characteristic of the youth of that period. In fact, the discussions around a glass of beer, amid the smoke of the pipes, were a preparation for this generation, and kept France awake, securely chloroformed though it was believed to be. More than one doctrinaire,* who, now provided for, or hoping soon to be so, affects the contempt of good taste for these bygone customs, and wishes

* Written for the St. Petersburg "*Nouveau Temps*" in 1878.

to look upon the new men as merely old students, has lived long enough, and indeed lives yet (I know some such), upon the scraps of eloquence or close reasoning carelessly scattered around those tables by some highly gifted prodigal. No doubt some of our young tribunes delayed too long, took root there, spoke for ever, and put nothing into practice. Every army corps has its laggards, eventually abandoned by the van; but Gambetta was not amongst these. If he enjoyed a fencing bout at the café under the gas-lights, it was only after a day of hard work.

As the foundry, at night, lets off its steam into the rivulet, so he came there to expend in words his overflow of spirits and ideas. This did not prevent him from being a student in real earnest, from achieving triumphant successes at the Molé conferences, or from keeping his terms and taking his diplomas and licences. One evening, at Madame Ancelot's—what ages since then, good heavens!—in that salon of the Rue Saint-Guillaume, full of sparkling senility, and birds in cages, I remember hearing some one say to the kind-hearted hostess: "My

son-in-law, Lachaud, has a new secretary, a very eloquent young man, it appears, with a very odd name. Let me see—he is called —yes! called M. Gambetta." Assuredly



the dear old lady was far from foreseeing the onward career of this young secretary, who was said to be eloquent, and who had such an odd name. And yet, putting on one side the inevitable calming down, the necessity of which is brought home by the

experience of life to less subtle comprehensions than his, putting aside a certain political knowledge of causes and secret springs, easily derived from the exercise of power and the handling of affairs; the licentiate of that day, considering his character and physiognomy as a whole, was even then much what he has ever been. He was not fat yet, but squarely built, round-shouldered, full of familiar gestures, and already having the habit of leaning on a friend's arm as he walked and talked; was undoubtedly a great talker, on all subjects, in that hard and loud meridional voice, which snaps out phrases like the tick of a pendulum, and strikes its best sayings as sharply and durably as medals; but he listened as well, questioned, read, assimilated everything, and was laying in that enormous stock of facts and ideas, so necessary to one who aspires to direct a country, and an epoch, as complicated as ours. Gambetta is one of the rare politicians who has any sympathy with Art, or who suspects that Literature is not without a certain hold upon a nation's life. This taste appears constantly in his conversation, and shows itself even in his speeches; but without

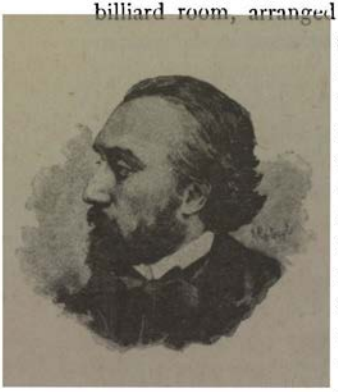
ostentation or pedantry, and coming as from one who has lived among artists, and to whom all relating to Art and Letters is a daily familiar thing. In the days of the Hôtel du Sénat, my friend the young lawyer would sometimes sacrifice a lecture to spend a few hours in the Museums, admiring the works of the great men; or to defend on the opening day of the Salon that great painter François Millet, then little understood, against the benighted opinions of those who lagged behind the march of time. His guide and mentor in the seven circles of hell in painting, was a meridional like himself; older, however, bristling and crabbed, with terrible eyes gleaming beneath huge overhanging eyebrows, like a brigand's fire in the depths of a cave veiled by brushwood. It was Théophile Silvestre, a splendid and indefatigable talker, with the voice of a mountaineer, having in it the unmistakeable metallic Ariège ring; a fine flavoured writer, an incomparable Art critic, adoring painters, and divining them with the comprehending subtlety of a lover and a poet. Filled with the presentiment of the great part Gambetta would one day hold, he loved the man who

was yet unknown to fame, and continued to love him later on, notwithstanding terrible differences in politics; and one day died at his table, of joy, one may say, in the delirious excitement of a tardy reconciliation. These wanderings through the Salon, the Louvre, on Théophile Silvestre's arm, had caused a reputation for idleness to be assigned to Gambetta by some few embryo statesmen, who had lived in cravats and tight frock coats from childhood. It is these same men, only grown a little, who, always full of themselves and always hermetically sealed, speak of him in private as a frivolous fellow, a politician without seriousness, because he takes pleasure in the company of a witty comrade who happens to be a comedian. This only proved that then as now, Gambetta was a judge of mankind, and knew that the great secret of being well served by men, is to make yourself beloved by them. One more trait of character will finish this portrait of the Gambetta of that time: that speaking trumpet of a voice, that terrible talker, that gasconading Gascon, was not a Gascon. Was it the influence of race? But on more than one side, this outrageous child of Cahors

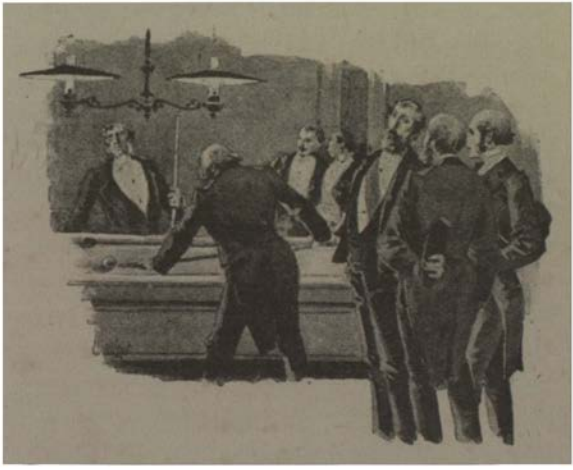
approached both the frontier and the neighbouring Italian prudence; the mixture of Genoese blood made of him almost a wary Provençal. Though speaking often, speaking eternally, he never allowed himself to be carried away in the whirlwind of his speech; wildly enthusiastic, he knew beforehand the exact point at which his enthusiasm should stop; and to sum up briefly, he is almost the only great talker of my acquaintance, who was not withal greater at promise than performance.

One morning, according to the usual ending, the noisy brood of nestlings which had perched itself in the Hôtel du Sénat, discovered its wings were grown, and took flight. One flew northwards, another south; they all dispersed to the four quarters of the globe. Gambetta and I lost sight of each other. I did not forget him, however; working hard on my own account, and living far removed from the world of politics, I used to ask myself sometimes: "What has become of my friend from Cahors?" and I should have felt astonished if he had not been on the high road to become *some one*. Some years afterwards, I chanced to find myself

at the Senate—not at the Hôtel, but at the Palace, on the evening of an official reception. I had taken refuge far from the music and the noise, on the corner of a divan in a billiard room, arranged in one of the vast apartments of Queen Mary of Médicis, with ceilings lofty enough to have accommodated some six storeys. It was the epoch of crisis, and of whimsical attempts at amiability, when the Empire tried to make love to the various parties, talked of mutual concessions, and under pretence of reforms and milder measures, tried to allure at one and the same time, the least deeply pledged Republicans and the last survivors of the old liberal *bourgeoisie*. Odilon Barrot, I remember,—the venerable Odilon Barrot,—was playing billiards. Quite a gallery of old men, or men prematurely aged, surrounded him, less attentive to his cannons than to the man



himself. They waited expectant for a phrase or a saying to fall from those once eloquent lips, to gather up phrase or saying, and reverently and devoutly enclose it in crystal, as did the angel with the tear of Eloa. But



Odilon Barrot remained obstinately silent; he chalked his cue, aimed at the balls with well studied movements and an air of noble solemnity, in which a whole past of *bourgeois* and starched parliamentary pomposity seemed to live again. Around him, scarcely a word was spoken: these conscript fathers of a bygone day, these Epimenides who had slept a

charmed sleep since Louis Philippe and 1848, exchanged ideas only in low tones, as if uncertain of being really awake. One caught these words on the wing, such scraps of phrases as: "Great scandal—Baudin's trial; scandal—Baudin." Scarcely ever reading the papers, and not stirring out till late in the day, I knew nothing about this famous case. All at once, I heard the name of Gambetta: "Who is this M. Gambetta then?" asked one of the old fellows, with intentional or naïve impertinence. All the recollections of my student life came back to me. I was sitting quietly in my corner, independent as an honest knight of the pen should be, who works hard for his daily bread, and too completely detached from all ties, and from all political ambition, for the presence of this Areopagus, venerable as it was, to impress me. "M. Gambetta?" I said rising, "why, he is decidedly a very remarkable man. I knew him as quite a young man, and we, one and all, predicted for him a very magnificent future." If you could have seen the general stupefaction at this sally! the cannons half played, the billiard cues in the air, the irritation of the

whole assemblage, and the balls themselves staring at me, from beneath the lamps with their round eyes. Whence came this fellow, this unknown, who had the audacity to defend another, and that actually before Odilon Barrot! A man of ready wit (there are a few such to be met with everywhere), M. Oscar de Vallée, saved me. He was a lawyer, Attorney-General maybe, what do I know about it? in the trade any way, and his advocate's cap, left in the cloak-room, giving him a decided right to speak, no matter where; he spoke: "Monsieur is perfectly right, M. Gambetta is by no means a nobody; we all think a good deal of him in the Law Courts on account of his eloquence;" and observing no doubt that the mention of eloquence did nor touch his hearers, he added persuasively: "for his eloquence and his judgment."

Then came the supreme assault against the Empire; the months seemed loaded with powder, rammed with menace; all Paris quivered beneath an indefinable breath of warning, as the forest before the storm. Ah! we were to see plenty, we of the generation that complained of having seen nothing.

Gambetta, at the conclusion of his pleadings in the Baudin trial, was on the way to become a great man. The veterans of the Republican party, the combatants of '51, the exiles, the *greybeards*, had a paternal affection for the young lawyer, the faubourgs expected great things from the "one-eyed Counsel," the youth of the day swore only by him. I used to meet him sometimes, and "he was just going to be made a deputy; or he had just returned from making a great speech at Lyons or at Marseilles!" Always in a state of exultation, always full of the excitement which characterizes the day after the battle, always with the atmosphere of combat about him, talking loud, wringing one's hand hard, and throwing back his flowing locks with a gesture full of decision and energy. Charming too, and more familiarly confidential than ever, delighted to be stopped on his road for a talk, or a laugh: "Breakfast at Meudon?" he replied to one of his friends, who invited him, "with pleasure! but not now; one of these days, when we shall have finished with the Empire."

Now behold us in the midst of that great scrimmage, the war; the fourth of September,

and Gambetta member of the National Defence, side by side with Rochefort. They met again, face to face, at the green-covered table, where proclamations and decrees were signed; just as twelve years before, across the American cloth which covered my table d'hôte. The sudden step to power of my two companions of the Quartier Latin did not astonish me. The air was full at that time of much more surprising prodigies. The vast crash of the downfalling Empire filled all ears still, and deadened the sound of the advancing footsteps of the Prussian army. I remember one of my first walks through the streets. I was returning from the country—a quiet nook in the forest of Sénart—the fresh odour of the leaves and of the river yet in my nostrils. I felt myself stunned; it was Paris no longer, but an immense fair, something like an enormous barrack holding revel. Everyone wore a shako, and all the petty trades of the streets, suddenly freed by the disappearance of the police, filled the whole town, as if New Year's Day were approaching, with cries, and a many-coloured display of wares. The crowd swarmed, the daylight fell; scraps of the *Marseillaise* floated in the

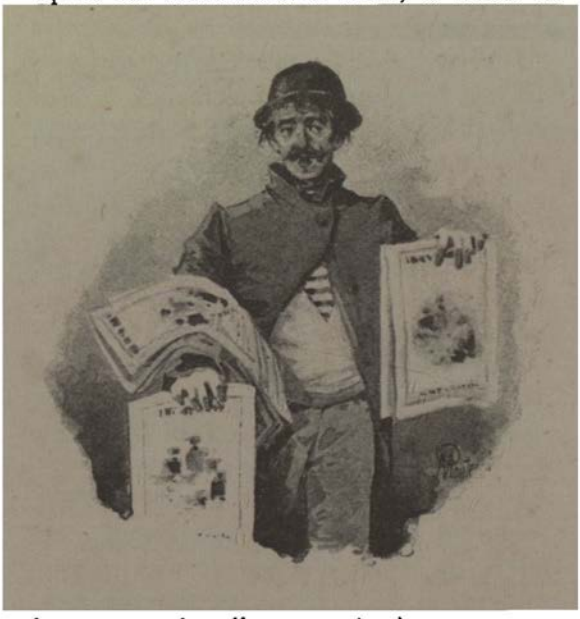
air. All at once, close to my ear, a coarse, drawling, jeering voice, cried: "Buy the history of the woman Bonaparte, her orgies, her lovers,—one penny!" and they offered me a square bit of paper, a hoax just fresh from the printing office. What a dream! And all in the very heart of Paris, not two steps from the Tuileries, where the sounds of the last festivities seemed to linger yet upon those self-same boulevards that I had seen only a few months previously swept clear, pavement and side walks, by blows from truncheons, wielded by squads of police. The antithesis made a profound impression upon me, and for five minutes I experienced the sharpest and clearest sensation of that superb and frightful thing men call a Revolution.

I saw Gambetta once, during this first period of the siege, at the Ministry of the Home Department, where he had just established himself, without betraying any astonishment, as one who attains a long contemplated eminence. He was completely at home, and was tranquilly receiving in a fatherly manner, with somewhat mocking good humour, those heads of departments who, but yesterday,

spoke slightingly of him as "that little Gambetta!" and who, now deeply impressed by him, bent themselves double, to sigh out, "If Monsieur le Ministre will graciously permit me!"

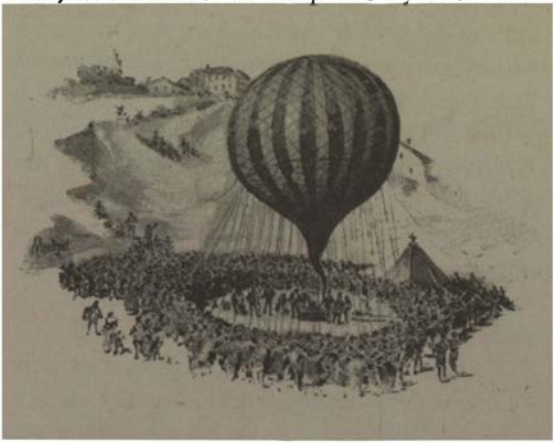
After this, I only saw Gambetta at rare intervals, by glimpses, and as though through some sudden rent, torn in the dark, cold, forbidding cloud, which hung over Paris during the siege. One of the meetings has left an indelible impression upon me. It was at Montmartre in the Place Saint-Pierre, at the foot of that slope of plaster and ochre, since covered with rolling rubbish from the works at the Church of the *Sacré Cœur;* but where, at that time, notwithstanding the footsteps of the numerous Dominican idlers, and the slides made by the street boys, a few wretched blades of grass, gnawed and shaved as they were, managed to make a show of green. Above us, in the mist, was the city with its thousand roofs, and its vast murmur of sound, which sank now and again before the heavy voice of the guns in the forts, heard from afar. There, in the Square, was a little awning, and in the middle of a space marked out by a cord, was a great yellow balloon,

straining at its cable, as it balanced in the air. Gambetta, it was said, was about to start, to electrify the provinces, to stir them up to the deliverance of Paris, to rouse all



hearts, to revive all courage, in short to renew (and perhaps but for the treason of Bazaine he might have succeeded) the miracles of 1792! At first, I noticed no one but friend Nadar, with his aëronaut's helmet that mingled

with all the events of the siege; then in the centre of the group, Spuller and Gambetta, both smothered in furs. Spuller was composed and quiet, courageous without ostentation, but unable to keep his eyes off the



enormous machine in which he was to take his place as head of the Cabinet, and murmuring in a dreamy voice, "It is really a most extraordinary thing." Gambetta, as usual, was talking and rolling his shoulders, almost delighting in the adventure. He saw me, pressed my hand: a grip which told of many things. Then he and Spuller got into the car. "Let go!" cried Nadar's voice. A

few hats waved, a cry of "Long live the Republic," a balloon soaring aloft, and then—nothing more.

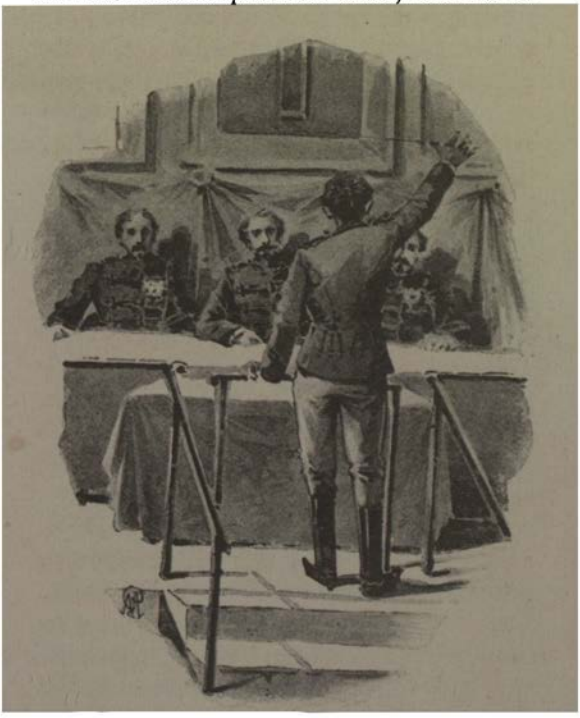
Gambetta's balloon arrived whole and safe, but how many others fell, pierced with Prussian balls, or perished at sea by night, without counting the incredible adventure of that one which was driven for twenty hours before the storm, and eventually came to grief in Norway, close to the Fjords and the Arctic sea. Certainly, whatever may have been said, some heroism was shown in starting upon these aërial journeys; and it is not without emotion that I think of that last hand-clasp, and of that wicker car, which smaller and yet more fragile than the historic bark of Cæsar, carried up into the winter sky all the hopes of Paris.

I did not meet Gambetta again till a year later, at the trial of Bazaine, in the summer dining-room of Marie Antoinette at Trianon, the graceful arcades of which stretch between the verdure of the two gardens, and widened and enlarged by means of partitions and hangings, and transformed into a council of war, still possessed in its panels, garlanded with doves and cupids, a remembrance, a

lingering perfume of past elegance. The Duc d'Aumale presided; Bazaine stood at the bar, haughty, headstrong, despotic, undisturbed by conscience, his chest barred with red, by the wide ribbon of the Legion of Honour. There was something great in this spectacle of a soldier, who, traitor to his country, was about to be judged under a Republican government, by the descendant of the ancient line of Kings. The witnesses filed past, uniforms and smock frocks; marshals and soldiers, post-office clerks, former ministers, peasants, and their women; foresters and custom-house men, whose feet, accustomed to the damp elasticity of the woods, or the rough surface of the high roads, slipped upon the smooth flooring, and stumbled over the carpets; and whose timid and bewildered bows would have created laughter, if the simple embarrassment of these humble heroes had not rather drawn tears. It was a faithful image of the sublime drama of resistance for country's sake, in which we moved, and in which all great or small found it our duty to take part. Gambetta was called. At this moment reactionary hatred was clamouring against his name, and they

spoke of trying him also. He came in, wearing a short overcoat, carrying his hat in his hand, and made the Duc d'Aumale a slight bow as he passed,—a bow that I can see even now—not too stiff, not too low, less a bow than a free-mason's sign between men who, although divided in opinion, are sure of meeting and agreeing upon any question of honour and patriotism. The Duc d'Aumale did not appear vexed, and I, in my corner, was delighted with the correct and dignified attitude of my old comrade; but I could not congratulate him upon it, and this is why. The blocade was scarcely raised, when, still trembling with obsidional fever, I had written an article upon Gambetta and the defence of the Provinces, which though perfectly sincere, was also very unjust, and which, when better informed, I had great pleasure in cutting out of my books. Every Parisian was a little mad at that time, myself among the rest. We had been so often lied to, so often deceived. We had read upon the town-hall walls so many posters, full of radiant hopes, so many enthusiastic proclamations followed next day by such lamentable downfalls; we had made so many senseless

and foolish marches, with a rifle over the shoulder and knapsack on back; we had so



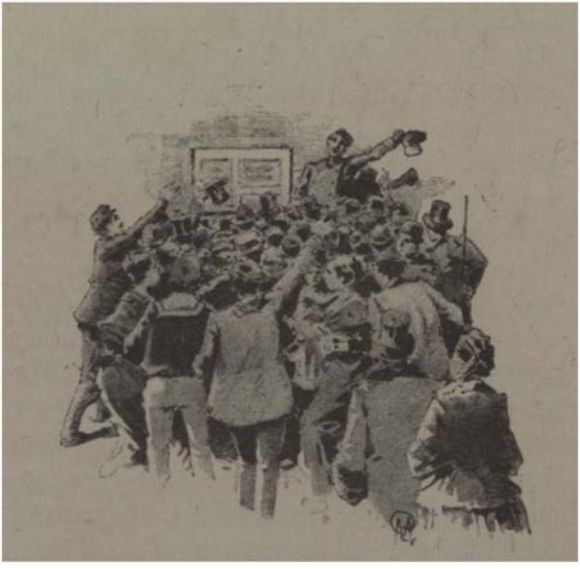
often been kept laid flat on our stomachs in the blood-stained mud, motionless, useless,

stupid, while shells rained over our backs! And then the spies, and the despatches! "Occupy the heights of Montretout, the enemy is retiring!" or again, "In the engagement of the day before yesterday, we captured two helmets and the sling of a rifle." And all the while, four hundred thousand national guards were tramping the pavements of Paris, asking nothing better than to get out and to fight! Then, when the gates were open, a misunderstanding arose, and while it was said in the Provinces, "Paris has made no fight of it at all!" it was whispered in Paris, "We have been basely abandoned by the Provinces." So that, furious, ashamed, powerless to distinguish anything in this fog of hatred and untruth, suspecting treason everywhere, and cowardice, and folly, one ended by classing all together, both Paris and Province. A reconciliation was made when we could see more clearly. The Provinces learnt how much useless heroism Paris displayed, during five months; and I, a besieged Parisian, recognized for my humble part, how admirable was the action of Gambetta in the departments, and the great movement of the "Defence," both of

which we had at first looked upon as a series of boasts worthy of Tarascon.

Once more I met Gambetta, about two years ago. There was no explanation; he came towards me with outstretched hands; it was at Ville-d'Avray, under the roof of the editor, Alphonse Lemerre, in the country house so long inhabited by Corot,—a charming house, made for a painter, or a poet; all the eighteenth century woodwork in fine preservation, the painted panels above the doors, and a little portico leading to the garden. It was in this garden that we breakfasted; in the open air, amid the flowers and the birds, beneath the great trees fit for Virgil's praise, that the venerable Master had loved to paint, their foliage tenderly green from the damp of the neighbouring ponds. We spent the afternoon in recalling the past, and how we, that is, Gambetta, the doctor, and myself, were the last survivors in Paris of our *table d'hôte*. Then came the turn of art and literature. I found with much delight, that Gambetta read everything, saw everything that was produced, remained, in short, a connoisseur, an expert, a refined scholar. Those were five delicious hours,

passed in that green and flowery retreat, lying between Paris and Versailles, and yet so far from all political turmoil. Gambetta, it would seem, fell under the charm of it; a week after this breakfast under the trees, he, also, bought for himself a country house at Ville-d'Avray.



THE STORY OF MY BOOKS.

NUMA ROUMESTAN.

When I began the story of my books, inspired thereto, some will say, by the fatuous vanity of an author, but which, it seemed to me, was the real way, original and unusual, of writing the memoirs of a literary man on the margin of his works, I took in it, I confess, a certain delight. To-day the pleasure is lessened. In the first place, the idea has been utilized by several of the confraternity, and by those not among the

least illustrious, and has necessarily lost some of its freshness; and then there is an ever-rising flood of great and small interviewers, and the noise and dust they raise over a piece or a play, in the shape of anecdotal details, is such that a writer who is neither a pontiff nor a curmudgeon cannot easily refuse them. And so my autohistorical task has become more difficult; they have trodden down at heel the dainty shoes that I had intended to wear only from time to time. It is certain, for instance, that what the newspapers wrote a few months ago in connection with the play taken from *Numa Roumestan*, and acted at the Odéon, all this curiosity and puffing have hardly left me anything interesting to tell about the story of my book, and may lead to a tiresome repetition on my part. At all events, it has helped me to destroy once and for all the legend, propagated by people who themselves did not believe in it, that its name of Roumestan hid the personality of Gambetta. As if that were possible! As though, had I wished to model a Gambetta, any one could have mistaken him, even under the mask of a Numa!

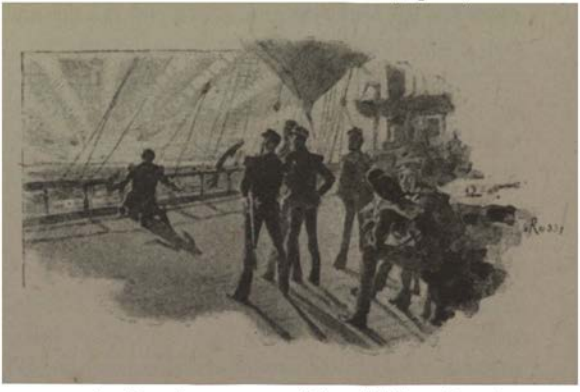
The fact is, that in a tiny green note-book full of closely-written memoranda and puzzling erasures now lying before me, I have, under the generic title of *The South*, made, during years and years, a complete summary of the country of my birth, its climate, customs, temperament; its accent, gestures, frenzies, and ebullitions caused by our sun, and the ingenuous tendency to lie, which proceeds from an excess of imagination, from an exuberant folly, gossiping and good-natured; so totally different from the cold, perverse, calculating lie met with in the North. I have gathered these observations from all sides, from myself as a standard of comparison, from my own folk, from my own family, and from amongst the recollections of my childhood, treasured up by a whimsical memory, in which each sensation, as soon as experienced, is marked down and stereotyped.

Everything is put down in that green book, from the country songs, the proverbial sayings and expressions wherein the instinct of a people is revealed, to the street cries of the hawkers of fresh water, the vendors of sugar-plums and *azeroles* at the fairs, even

to the moans over our illnesses, most of them nervous and rheumatic, bred by the skies full of wind and flame that consume the very marrow, reducing the whole being to a pulp, like sugar-cane, all of which are increased and exaggerated by vivid imagination; all are noted down; even the crimes of the South, the explosions of passion, of drunken violence, drunkenness begotten without drink, perplexing and scaring the conscience of the judges, brought thither from a different clime, who are bewildered in the midst of these exaggerations, these incredible testimonies they cannot classify. It is from these memoranda, that I drew *Tartarin de Tarascon*, *Numa Roumestan*, and, more recently, *Tartarin sur les Alpes*. Other Southern books lie there, in the rough; humoristic pieces, novels, physiological studies: Mirabeau, the Marquis de Sade, Raousset-Boulbon, and the *Malade Imaginaire*, which Molière most assuredly brought back from my Southern home. And even an historical essay, if I am to believe an ambitious line scribbled on a corner of the note-book: *Napoleon, man of the South,—synthetise in his person the whole race.*

Yes, indeed, I had dreamt even that—that the day might come, when the novel of the period should disgust and fatigue me by the narrowness and conventionality of its compass, a day when I should feel a desire to extend my thoughts further and higher. I had almost dreamt even this: to give the predominating note of the marvellous existence of Napoleon, and solve that extraordinary man, by the one simple word: *the South*, which notwithstanding all the science of Taine, has never suggested itself to his mind. The South, pompous, classical, theatrical, loving display and brilliant costumes,—careless of a few stains, here and there,—the oratory of the platform, fine plumes, flags, and military music floating in the wind. The South, homely and traditional, with somewhat of the East in its clannish and tribal-like fidelity; a taste for sweet dishes and the incurable contempt of woman, which does not however prevent passion and voluptuousness, carried to frenzy. The South, fawning and feline, with a dashing and flashing eloquence, devoid of colour, for colour belongs to the North,—with its short and terrible furies, showy and grimacing, always rather

fictitious even when sincere, tragic, comic,—storms of the Mediterranean, ten feet of foam on perfectly calm waters. The South, superstitious and idolatrous, willingly forgetful of the gods, in the agitation of its salamander-like existence on a blazing pile; but



remembering the prayers of its childhood at the first threat of illness or misfortune. (Napoleon on his knees, praying at sunset, on the deck of the *Northumberland*, hearing mass twice a week in the dining-room at Saint Helena.) And lastly and above all, the great characteristic of the race, imagination, which no man of action possessed in so vast and wild a degree as he. (Witness his dreams of

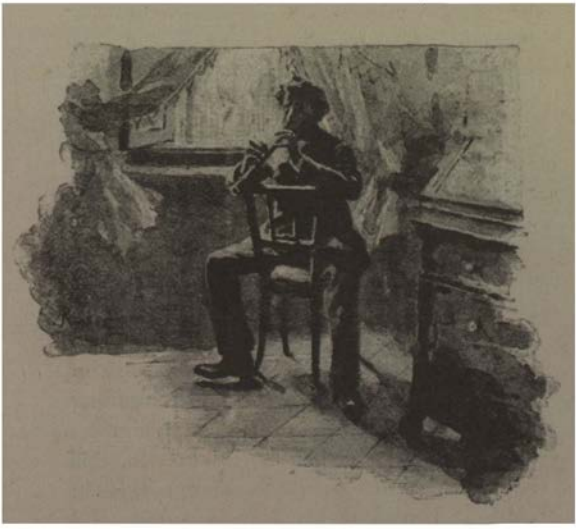
conquered Egypt, Russia, India.) Such is the Napoleon I should wish to depict, in all the principal acts of his public life, and all the minute details of his private life, giving him at the same time for walking gentleman, a Bompard, imitating and exaggerating all his gestures, and his plumes,—another Southerner; Murat of Cahors, poor, brave Murat, who was seized and shot with his back against a wall, for having attempted also his little return from Elba.

However, let us leave the historical work that I have not done, that I may never have time to write, and return to the novel of *Numa*, already a few years old, and in which so many of my country folk have pretended to recognize themselves, although each personage has been constructed out of bits and pieces. One only, and as might have been expected, the most fanciful, the most unlikely of all, was taken on the spot, strictly copied from nature; it is the chimerical and rapturous Bompard, a silent and repressed Southerner, who moves only by explosive bursts, and whose inventions surpass all reasonable bounds, because this visionary is lacking in the prolixity of spoken or written

words, which is our safety-valve. This type of Bompard is frequent enough amongst us; but I have only thoroughly studied this one, an amiable and gentle companion, whom I sometimes meet on the boulevard, and to whom the publication of *Numa* caused no ill humour; for with the mass of romance perpetually seething in his brain, he has no time to read those of others.

Of my drummer Valmajour, some traits are real, for instance, his little phrase: "*It occurred to me at night*," was culled word for word from his ingenuous lips. I have told elsewhere the burlesque and lamentable epic poem of this native of Draguignan, whom my dear, noble, Mistral sent one day to me, with these words: "I send you Buisson, a performer on the drum; pilot him," and the innumerable series of failures we made, Buisson and I, in the wake of his rustic fife, through salons, theatres and concerts of Paris. But here is the real truth, that I could not tell during his lifetime, lest I should do him harm; now that death has staved in his drum, *pécaïré!* and stopped up with black earth the three holes of his flute, I may tell the true story.

Buisson was but a false drummer, a little citizen of the South, clarionetist or cornopeist in a municipal brass band, who had, in order to amuse himself, learnt and improved the

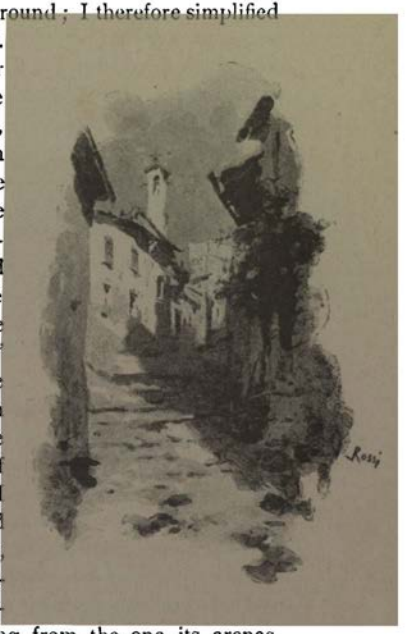


fingering of the fife, and the *massette* of the ancient peasant fêtes of Provence. When he arrived in Paris, the unlucky fellow knew neither an air of his country, nor a serenade for dawn, or for twilight, nor yet a *farandole*.

His stock in trade consisted merely of the Overture of the *Cheval de Bronze*, the *Carnaval de Venise*, and the *Pantéïns de Violette*, the whole very brilliantly executed, 'tis true, but rather deficient in local colouring for a drummer guaranteed by Mistral. I taught him a few of Saboly's Christmas Carols: *Saint-José said to me, Ture-lure-lure, the cock crows*, and then the *Fishermen of Cassis*, the *Girls of Avignon*, and the *March of the Magi*, that Bizet, a few years later, arranged so marvellously for the orchestra, in our *Arlésienne*. Buisson, who was rather a clever musician, noted down the airs as they followed, repeating them day and night, in his lodging in the Rue Bergère, to the great annoyance of his neighbours, who were exasperated by this harsh droning music. When trained, I launched him on the town, where his queer French, his Ethiopian complexion, his thick eyebrows, close and bristling like his moustaches, and moreover his exotic stock of music, took in even the Southerners in Paris, who believed him to be a real drummer, not however, that this added, alas, in any way to his success.

Although such was nature's product, the

type seemed to me somewhat complex, especially for a character that was not to occupy the foreground; I therefore simplified it for my book. As for the other personages of the novel, I repeat, from Roumestan down to the little Audiberte, all are made out of several models, and as Montaigne says, "a jumble of many pieces." The same can be said of Aps in Provence, the native town of Numa, which I have constructed with bits of Arles, Nîmes, Saint-Rémy, and Cavaillon, borrowing from the one its arenas, from another its old Italian by-streets, narrow and pebbled like the dry beds of torrents; its



Monday markets held under the massive plane-trees of the ramparts: taking hither and thither those white Provençal roads, bordered by tall reeds, snowy and crackling with hot dust, over which I ran when I was twenty, possessor of an old windmill, and ever wrapped up in my great woollen cape. The house where Numa is born, is that I inhabited when eight years old, Rue Séguier, opposite the Academy of Nimes; the school kept by the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine and terrorised over by the famous Boute-à-Cuire, and his pickled rod, is the school of my childhood; all these are the recollections in the furthest recesses of my memory—"First birds of the season," as the Provençal folk say.

These are the substratum and real facts, very simple as can be seen, of *Numa Roumestan*, which appears to me the least incomplete of all my books, the one in which I have best revealed myself, into which I have put the most invention, in the best sense of the word. I wrote it in the spring and summer of 1880, in the Avenue de l'Observatoire, above the grand chestnut trees of the Luxembourg, gigantic nosegays, all rounded with white and pink clusters; through which came

to me the laughter of children, the tinkling bells of the hawkers of liquorice water, and the sounds of military brass bands. Its construction gave me no fatigue, like everything that comes from the heart. It first appeared in the *Illustration*, with drawings by Emile

Bayard, who lived near me, on the other side of the avenue.

Several days in the week, I went in the morning, and settled myself in his studio, gradually communicating my personage to him, as he grew beneath my pen; explaining, commenting, upon the South for the benefit of this infatuated Parisian, who still believed in the Gascon who was taken off to be hanged, and in the comic songs of Levassor

about the Canebière. Is it not true, Bayard, that I acted my beloved South for you, and pantomimed it, sang it to you, brought home to you the noise of the crowd at the bull-fight, the wrestling for men and youths, and the chaunting of the penitents in the processions on the Fête-Dieu? And it was certainly either you, or one of your pupils whom I carried off to drink *carthagène* and eat *barquettes* at the "Produce of the South," in the Rue Turbigo.

Published by Charpentier, with the tender dedication that has always brought me luck, and which ought always to be placed at the beginning of my books, the novel was very successful. Zola honoured it with a flattering and cordial article, only finding to reprove as too incredible, the love of Hortense Le Quesnoy for the drummer; since then several others have made the same criticism. And yet, if I had to write my book over again, I would not give up that effect of mirage on this intrepid and burning little spirit, a victim, she also, to IMAGINATION. But why was she consumptive? Why this sentimental and romantic death, this easy bait held out to the sensibility of the reader. Ah, because

one is not master of one's creation, because during its gestation, while the ideas tempt and haunt us, a thousand trifles become mixed up, dragged up, and picked up, on the wayside, in the haphazard of life, like weeds in the meshes of a net. While I was working out *Numa*, I had been sent to the waters at Allevard; and there, in the inhaling rooms, I saw youthful faces, drawn, hollow, furrowed as with a knife; I heard poor undermined voices without sound; harsh coughs, followed by the same furtive motion of the handkerchief, watching for the rosy stain at the corner of the mouth. And from out of these pale impersonal apparitions, one took shape in my book, almost in spite of myself, with the melancholy life of the watering-place, its exquisite pastoral surroundings, and all this has remained in my book.

Numa Baragnon, my compatriot, formerly a minister, or nearly one, deceived by a similitude of Christian names, was the first to recognise himself in Roumestan. He protested. His horses had never been unharnessed! But a legend, from Germany, the awkward advertisement of a Dresden editor, soon replaced Baragnon's name by

that of Gambetta. I will not allude again to this folly; I can only affirm, that Gambetta did not believe it, and that he was the first to be amused by it.

Dining one evening side by side, at our editor's, he asked me if the "when I do not speak, I do not think" of Roumestan was a phrase invented by myself, or whether I had heard it.

"Pure invention, my dear Gambetta."

"Ah! well," he said, "this morning at the Council of Ministers, one of my colleagues, a Southerner from Montpellier, declared that '*he only thought while speaking.*' Decidedly the phrase is of that country."

And for the last time, I heard his broad, hearty laugh.

All Southerners did not show themselves so intelligent, and *Numa Roumestan* procured me no end of furious anonymous letters, almost all with the post-marks of the warmer climes. The *félibres* themselves caught fire. Verses were read at a meeting in which I was called a renegade and evil-doer. "If one wished to give him a reveille, the very drum-sticks would fall from one's hands," says a Provençal sonnet of old Borelly. And I, who

reckoned on my countrymen to bear witness that I had neither caricatured nor lied! But no, question them, even to-day, when their anger has subsided; and the most excitable, the most exaggerated Southerner amongst them will reply, with an assumption of rational moderation:

"Oh, all that is very exaggerated!"

THE FRANCS-TIREURS.

Written during the Siege of Paris.

We were drinking tea the other evening, at the house of the *tabellion* of Nanterre. I take a certain delight in using the old word *tabellion*, because it is in keeping with the Pompadour style of the pretty village, where *rosières* * flourish, and of the antiquated salon where we were seated round a fire of logs,

* Rosière, the most virtuous girl of the village, who at the age of twenty is crowned with roses and given a marriage portion.

blazing up brightly in a large chimney, decorated with *fleurs de lis*. . . The master of the house was absent, but his good-natured, shrewd face, hanging in a corner of the room, presided over the festive scene, and peacefully smiled down from the depths of an oval frame, on the strange guests occupying his drawing-room.

A curious medley indeed, for an evening party at a notary's. Braided overcoats, beards eight days old, forage caps, hooded capes, and military boots; and all around, on the piano, on the little tables, pell-mell with the lace-covered cushions, the boxes of Spa wood, and the work-baskets, were lying sabres and revolvers. All this made a strange contrast with the patriarchal dwelling, in which still seemed to linger an odour of the famous Nanterre cakes, offered by some handsome *notaresse* to the rosières in muslin. Alas! there are no longer any rosières in Nanterre. They have been replaced by a battalion of *Francs-Tireurs* from Paris, and it was the staff of this battalion—billeted in the notary's house—that had invited us to tea, that evening.

Never did chimney-corner seem to me

more delightful. Outside, the wind blew over the snow, and brought us with the sound of the shivering hours, the challenge call of the sentinels, and from time to time the dull report of a chassepot. In the drawing-room, we talked but little. Outpost duty is rough work, and we were very tired by night-fall. And then, the perfume of familiar comfort, rising from the teapot in pale clouds of steam, had taken possession of us all, and as it were hypnotised us, in the notary's large arm-chairs.

Suddenly, there was a sound of hurried steps, and a breathless telegraph messenger with flashing eyes made his appearance:

"To arms! to arms! The outpost at Rueil is attacked."

It was an advanced guard, established by the *francs-tireurs* at about ten minutes' distance from Nanterre, in the railway station at Rueil, one might almost say in Pomerania, it seemed so far off! In the twinkling of an eye, all the officers of the staff were on their legs, armed and buckled, and were scurrying into the streets to muster the companies. There was no need of bugle-call for that. The *first* was quartered at the

parish priest's; a couple of kicks at the door quickly roused them.

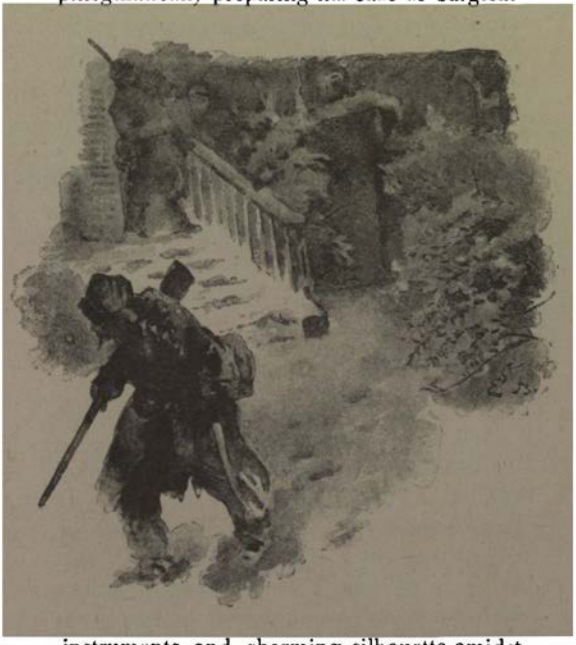
"To arms! Get up!"

And then they ran off to the registrar's office, where the *second* was lodged.

Oh! that little dark village, with its pointed steeple covered with snow, its tiny stiffly planted gardens, where the little gate bells sounded like shop doors, as you opened them; those mysterious houses, those wooden staircases up which I climbed, groping my way behind the big sabre of the adjutant-major; the warm breath of the sleeping-rooms, in which we shouted the alarm call, the guns that resounded in the darkness, the men heavy with sleep, stumbling as they re-joined their post, while at the corner of a street, five or six stupefied peasants with lanterns in their hands, said in low tones: "The attack has begun, the attack has begun;" all this seemed to me at the time a mere dream, but the impression it has left upon me is distinct and ineffaceable.

Here is the square, with the town-hall all black, the lighted-up windows of the telegraph office, the ante-room where the bearers of despatches are waiting, lantern in hand;

in a corner, the Irish surgeon of the battalion phlegmatically preparing his case of surgical



instruments, and, charming silhouette amidst all the confusion of a skirmishing party, a little *vivandière*—dressed in blue, like the children in an orphanage—sleeping before

the fire, a gun between her legs; and, quite at the back of the room, the telegraphic bureau, the camp beds, the large table, white under a flood of light, the two clerks bent over their instruments, and leaning over from behind them, the major, following with anxious gaze the long strips which unroll and bring, minute by minute, fresh news from the attacked post. Decidedly, it appears that it is getting hot over there. Despatch follows despatch. The telegraph wildly shakes its electric bells, and hurries the tic-tac of its sewing-machine sounds till you suppose it will break.

"Come quick," says Rueil.

"We are coming," replies Nanterre.

And the companies start off in haste.

Certainly, I must admit that war is the saddest and stupidest thing in the world. I know nothing, for instance, so lugubrious as a January night spent shivering like an old soldier in the trench of an outpost; nothing more absurd than to receive on the head half an iron pot from a distance of five miles; but to start off to battle on a fine frosty night with a full stomach and a warm heart, to dash at full speed into darkness and adven-

ture, shoulder to shoulder with a company of good fellows, is a delightful pleasure, and resembles a delicious intoxication, a peculiar intoxication, however, which sobers any drunkard, and sharpens the dullest sight.

For my part, my sight was excellent that night. Nevertheless, there was little moonlight, and it was the earth white with snow that lighted the sky,—a theatrical light, cold and raw, spreading to the furthest end of the plain, and on which the smallest details of the landscape, a bit of wall, a sign-post, a line of willows, stood out sharp and black, as though divested of their shadows. In the little road by the side of the railway the *francs-tireurs* sped at double-quick time. Nothing could be heard but the vibration of the telegraph wires, the panting breath of the men, the whistle-call thrown to the sentinels, and, from time to time, a shell from Mont Valérien passing over our heads, like a night bird with a formidable flapping of wings. As we advanced, we saw in front of us, on a level with the ground, distant shots starring the darkness. Then on the left, at the end of the plain, the great flames of some conflagration rose silently upwards.

"In front of the manufactory, in skirmishing order!" commanded our Captain.

"Some one is going to pay for it to-night!" said my left-hand neighbour, with an accent of the faubourg.

In one bound the officer was upon us:

"Who spoke? Was it you?"

"Yes, Captain, I."

"All right; go away; return to Nanterre."

"But, Captain——"

"No, no; be off with you. I don't want you. Ah! you're afraid of having to pay for it to-night. Come, make yourself scarce, go away!"

And the poor devil was obliged to leave the ranks; but in five minutes he had stealthily returned to his place, and in future only asked to be allowed to pay for it.

After all, fate willed that no one should pay for it that night. When we reached the barricade the fray had ended. The Prussians, who had hoped to surprise our small post, finding it on the alert and safe from a *coup de main*, had prudently retired; and we were just in time to see them disappear at the end of the plain, silent and black as cockroaches.

However, for fear of another attack, we had orders to remain at Rueil station, and we finished the night on the alert, with our arms ready, some on the platform and others in the waiting-room.

Poor Rueil station, I had known it so cheerful and so bright; aristocratic station of the Bougival boating parties, where the Parisian summer seemed to flaunt its muslin flounces and its feathered bonnets! It is hard, indeed, to recognize it in this lugubrious cellar, this iron-case, padded tomb, smelling of powder, petroleum, and mouldy straw, where we talk in low tones, closely pressed against one another, and have for sole light the spark of our pipes and the streak of light from the officers' corner. From hour to hour, to keep us alive, we are sent in detachments to skirmish along the Seine, or to patrol the village of Rueil, whose empty streets and almost abandoned houses are lighted up by the cold gleam of a conflagration, set alight by the Prussians at Bois-Préau.

The night was thus spent without accident, and in the morning we were sent back.

When I reached Nanterre it was still dark.

On the square of the town-hall the telegraphic window shone like a light-house, and in the drawing-room occupied by the staff, in front of his hearth, where the smouldering embers were dying out, M. the *tabellion* was still smiling peacefully.

THE GARDEN OF THE RUE DES ROSIERS.

Written March 22nd, 1871.

Put not your trust in the names of streets, nor in the peaceful appearance thereof! When, after having clambered over barricades and mitrailleuses, I reached the top of Montmartre, and from behind the windmills looked down and saw the little Rue des Rosiers, with its pebbled roadway, its gardens, and small

houses, I could have fancied myself far away in the provinces, in one of those quiet suburbs where the town as it becomes more scattered, finally dwindles down and disappears in the surrounding fields. In front of me, nothing was to be seen but a flight of pigeons and two sisters of mercy in their large caps, timidly skirting the wall. In the distance, rose the Solferino tower, a vulgar and heavy fortress, Sunday resort of the neighbourhood that the siege has almost rendered picturesque, by reducing it to a ruin.

By degrees, as I advanced, the street widened out, and wore a more animated appearance. There were tents laid out in a line, cannon and stacks of guns, and on the left-hand side a large gateway, in front of which national guards were smoking their pipes. The house was at the back and could not be seen from the street. After some parley, the sentinel allowed me to enter. It was a two-storied house, situated between a court-yard and garden, and had nothing tragic about it. It belongs to the heirs of M. Scribe.

The rooms on the ground floor, light, airy, and hung with flowery papers, opened into

the passage leading from the little paved court-yard to the garden. It was here that the former *Comité Central* held its meetings. It was hither, that on the afternoon of the 18th, the two generals were conveyed and that they endured the anguish of their last hour; while the mob yelled in the garden outside, and the deserters came and stuck their hideous faces against the windows, scenting blood like wolves; here, at last, that the two corpses were brought back, and remained exposed for two days to the public gaze.

With heavy heart, I went down the three steps leading to the garden, a true surburban garden, where each tenant has his corner of currant bushes and clematis, separated by green trellis-work with belled gates. The fury of a mob had passed over all. The enclosures were knocked down, the flower-beds torn up. Nothing was left standing but certain quincunxes of limes, some twenty trees, freshly trimmed, with their hard grey branches uprising in the air, like a vulture's talons. An iron railing went round the back by way of wall, showing in the distance the

immense, melancholy valley, and the tall smoking factory chimneys.

The calm brought by time, steals over things as well as over human beings. Here I am on the very scene of the drama, and yet I experience a certain difficulty in recalling an impression of it. The weather is mild, the sky clear. These Montmartre soldiers who surround me seem good-natured fellows. They sing, and play at pitch and toss. The officers laugh as they saunter to and fro! The great wall alone, riddled with bullets, and with crumbled coping, stands up like a witness and relates the crime. It was against this wall they were shot.

It appears that at the last moment General Lecomte, who till then had been firm and resolute, felt his courage fail him. He struggled and tried to escape, ran a few steps in the garden, was seized again immediately, shaken, dragged, jostled, fell on his knees and spoke of his children.

"I have five," he said sobbing.

The heart of the father had burst the tunic of the soldier. There were fathers also in that mad crowd, and some pitying voices

answered his despairing appeal; but the inexorable deserters would not listen.

"If we do not shoot him to-day, he will have us shot to-morrow."

He was thrust against the wall. Imme-

diately after, the sergeant of an infantry regiment approached him.

"General," he said, "you must promise us——"

Then suddenly changing his mind, he took a couple of steps backwards, and discharged his chassepot full in his chest. The others had only to finish him off.

Clément Thomas, however, did not give way for one instant.

Placed against the same wall as Lecomte, at two paces from his body, he faced death to the end, and spoke in a dignified manner. When the guns were lowered, he instinctively raised his left arm before his face, and the old Republican died in the attitude of Cæsar. At the spot where they fell, against the cold wall, bare like the target of a shooting gallery, a few branches of a peach-tree are still spread out, and at the top blooms an early flower, all white, spared by the bullets and unsullied by the powder.

On quitting the Rue des Rosiers, through the silent roads rising one above the other, along the sides of the hill, full of gardens and terraces, I came to the former cemetery of Montmartre, that had been reopened a few days before, to receive the bodies of the two generals. It is a village cemetery, bare, without trees, adorned by nothing but grave-stones. Like those rapacious peasants, who in ploughing their land encroach each day on the pathway that crosses their fields, making it finally disappear altogether; so

here, death has invaded everything, even the alleys. The tombs crowd one above the other. Every place is filled. One is at a loss to know where to step.

I know nothing sadder than these old cemeteries. One feels oneself to be in presence of a vast assemblage, and yet no one is visible. Those who lie there, seemed indeed twice dead.

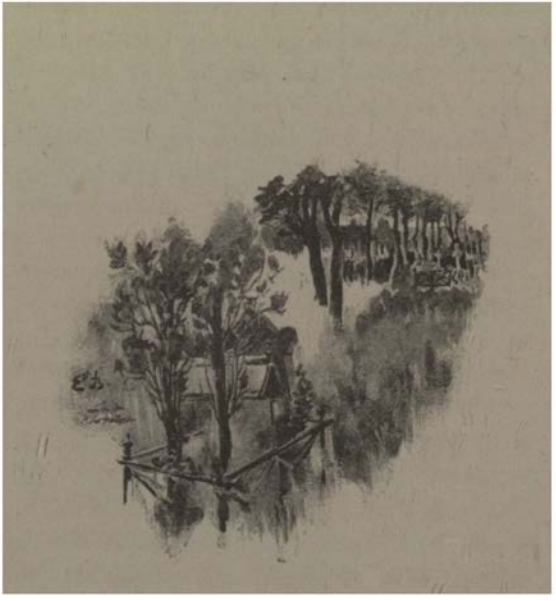
"What are you looking for?" inquired a kind of half gardener, half gravedigger, in a national guard's forage cap, who was mending a railing.

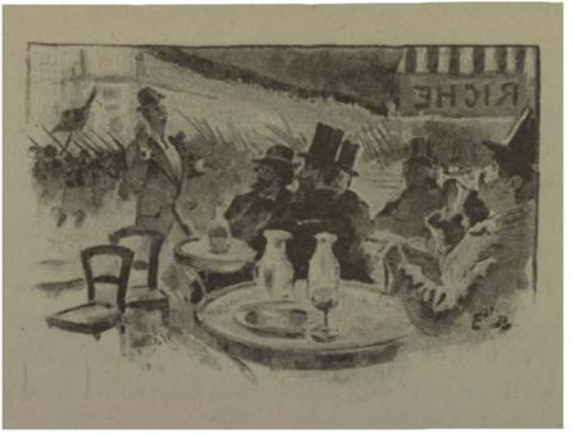
My answer astonished him. For a moment he hesitated, looked around him, and lowering his voice:

"Over there," he said, "near the cowl."

What he called the cowl, was a sentry-box in japanned sheet-iron, sheltering a few tarnished glass-beaded wreaths, and old filigree flowers. By its side was a wide slab, which had been recently raised. Not a railing, not an inscription. Nothing but two bunches of violets, wrapped in white paper, with a stone placed on their stalks that the strong wind of the hill-side may not blow

them away. It is here they sleep side by side. It is in this transitory tomb, awaiting restoration to their families, that a billet has been given to these two soldiers.





AN ESCAPE.

Written during the Commune.

On one of the last days of the month of March five or six of us were seated at a table, in front of the Café Riche, watching the battalions of the Commune march past. There had been as yet no fighting, but assassinations had already taken place in the Rue des Rosiers, Place Vendôme, and at the Préfecture de Police. The farce was rapidly turning into a tragedy, and the boulevard laughed no longer.

. . . . . .

In serried ranks round the red flag, with their canvas bags slung across the shoulder, the *communeux* tramped along with resolute step, covering the whole roadway; and when one looked at all these people under arms, so far from their working districts, with cartridge-pouches tightly buckled over their fustian jackets, the workmen's hands clutching the butt end of their guns, it was impossible not to think of the empty workshops and the abandoned factories.

This march past was in itself a menace. We all understood it, and the same sad, undefinable presentiment chilled our hearts.

At this moment, a tall, indolent and bloated swell, known to all the boulevard, from Tortoni to the Madeleine, approached our table. He was one of the most contemptible specimens of the fast man of the late Empire, a second-hand exquisite, who had never done anything but pick up on the boulevard all the eccentricities of the upper ten; baring his throat like Lutteroth, wearing ladies' dressing-gowns like Mouchy, bracelets like Narishkine, keeping for five years a card of Grammont-Caderousse stuck in his looking-glass; and withal painted like any old actor,

dropping all his r's, in the affected style of the Directoire, saying: "*Pa'ole d'honneu'. Bonjou' Ma'ame,*" bringing the smell of Tattersall's stables everywhere on his boots, and with just enough education to be able to scratch his name on the mirrors of the Café Anglais, which, however, did not prevent him from posing as a thorough theologian, and from exhibiting from one restaurant to another his disdainful, used-up, blasé manner, which at that time constituted the height of "form."

During the siege, my fine fellow had had himself attached to some kind of staff—merely to save his riding horses—and from time to time, his ungainly figure might be seen, parading the neighbourhood of the Place Vendôme, amongst all the other grand gold-laced gentlemen; since then, I had lost sight of him. Therefore, to find him again suddenly in the midst of the insurrection, ever the same, in this convulsed Paris, produced on me the lugubrious and comical impression of an old veteran of the first empire, carrying out his pilgrimage of the 5th of May in the midst of the modern boulevard. The race of wretched Dun-

drearies was not ended then? There were still some left! In reality, I think that had I been given a choice, I would have preferred those infuriated *communards* who gathered on the ramparts, with a dry crust at the bottom of their rough canvas wallets. These at least had something in their heads, some vague, wild ideal which floated above them, and took some fierce colouring from the folds of that red rag, for which they were going to die. But he, empty rattle, with his vacant, breadcrumb brain!

That day precisely, our friend was more insipid, more indolent, more full of fine airs than usual. He wore a little straw hat with blue ribbons, his moustache was well waxed, his hair cropped Russian fashion; a short coat displayed all his figure, and to be thoroughly complete, at the end of a silken cord, used as a leash, he led a lady's lap-dog, a little Havanese dog the size of a rat, which, buried in its long hair, looked as bored and fatigued as his master. Thus got up, he planted himself in a languid attitude in front of our table, and watched the *communeux* defiling past, made some foolish remark, then with a slouch and a swing that

were positively inimitable, declared to us that these fellows were beginning to make his blood boil, and that he was going off at once to "place his sword at the service of the Admiral!" The fiat had gone forth, the declaration was launched! Lasouche or Priston have never found anything more comic. Thereupon he turned away, and strolled off languidly, followed by his little sulky dog.

I know not whether in reality he did place his sword at the Admiral's disposal; but in any case, M. Saisset did not make much use of it, for eight days later, the flag of the Commune floated over all the mayors' offices, the drawbridges were raised, fighting had begun everywhere, and from hour to hour the side walks grew emptier and the streets more deserted. Everyone tried to escape as best he might—in the market-gardeners' carts, in the luggage vans of the embassies. Some disguised themselves as bargemen, stokers, or navvies. The most romantic crossed the ramparts at night with rope-ladders. The boldest went thirty at a time, and passed through a gate by storm; others, more practical, simply offered a bribe of five

francs. Many followed hearses, and went wandering about the fields of the surrounding suburbs, with umbrellas and chimney-pot hats, black from head to foot, like village tipstaffs. Once outside, all these Parisians looked at each other laughingly, breathed freely, capered about, made fun of Paris; but soon the nostalgia of the asphalte regained possession of them, and the emigration, begun as truant schoolboys, became sad and burdensome as an exile.

My mind full of these ideas of escape, I was one morning strolling down the Rue de Rivoli, in pouring rain, when I was stopped by seeing a familiar face. At that early hour, there was scarcely anything in sight but the sweeping-machines, gathering up the mud in little gleaming heaps along the side of the pavement, and the rows of tumbrels filled one after the other by the scavengers. Horror! it was under the bespattered smock of one of these men, that I recognized my masher, well disguised indeed!—a battered felt hat, a neck-handkerchief tied like a wisp round the throat, and the wide trousers called by the Parisian workman (pardon me the word) a *salopette;* all

this was wet, shabby, threadbare, covered with a thick coating of mire, that the wretched creature did not even then consider thick enough, for I detected him trampling in the puddles, and kicking the mud up to the

very roots of his hair. It was this peculiar manœuvre that attracted my attention.

"Good morning, Vicomte," I said to him in an undertone as I passed. The Vicomte grew pale under his mud stains, threw a terrified glance around him, then seeing everyone busy, he regained a little assurance, and told me that he had not chosen to place his sword (always his sword) at the

service of the Commune, and that his butler's brother, mud contractor at Montreuil, had fortunately contrived for him this possibility of leaving Paris. He could not add more. The carts were full, and the procession was beginning to move on. My fellow had but time to run to his team, take up his position in the file, crack his whip and, hoi! go on! he was off. The adventure interested me. In order to see the end of it, I followed the tumbrels at a distance, as far as the Porte de Vincennes.

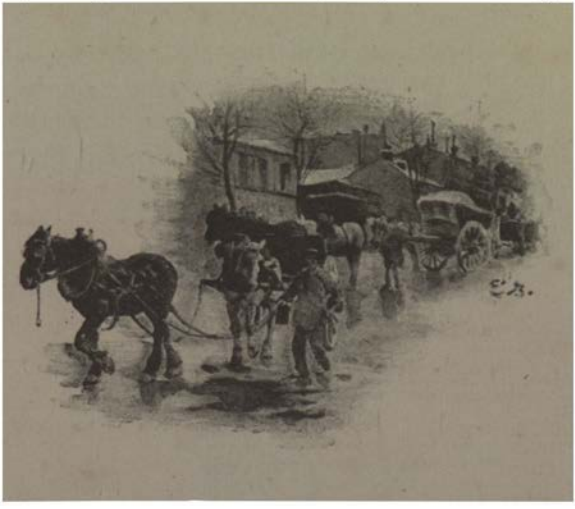
Each man walked at the side of his horses, whip in hand, leading his team by a leathern rein. To make his task easier they had put the Vicomte the last, and it was pitiful to see the poor devil striving to do like the others, to imitate their voice, their gait, that heavy bent, drowsy gait, swinging along with the rolling of the wheels, regulated by the step of the overladen animals. At times they stopped to allow some battalion to pass on its way to the ramparts. Then he would assume a bustling air, swear, use his whip, and make himself as much of a carter as possible; but, from time to time, the man of fashion re-appeared. This scavenger looked

at women. In front of a cartridge manufactory, Rue de Charonne, he paused for a moment to watch the factory girls entering. The aspect of the great faubourg, all the swarms of people seemed to astonish him very much, and the startled glances he threw right and left showed his surprise, as though he fancied himself in an unknown country.

And yet Vicomte, you have travelled over these long streets leading to Vincennes often enough, on fine spring and autumn Sundays, when you were returning from the races, with a green card stuck in your hat, and a leather bag slung over your shoulder, cracking your whip in delicate and masterly style. But then you were perched up so high in your phaeton, you were surrounded with such a mass of flowers, ribbons, ringlets, and gauze veils, the wheels that almost touched your own, enveloped you in such a luminous and aristocratic dust, that you never saw the dark windows opening at your approach, nor the workmen's homes, where, at that very hour, they were sitting down to dinner; and when you had passed by, when all that long train of luxurious existence, the bright silks

and startling golden locks of the women, all had disappeared towards Paris, bearing away with it its gilded atmosphere, you did not know how much more gloomy the Faubourg became, how much more bitter seemed the bread, how much heavier the tool appeared, nor what you left there of accumulated hatred and anger. A volley of oaths and cracks of the whip cut short my soliloquy. We had reached the Porte de Vincennes. The drawbridge had been lowered, and in the twilight, in the downpour of rain, in the midst of the obstruction caused by the crowding carts, the national guards examining the permits, I perceived the poor Vicomte struggling with his three large horses, which he was trying to turn round. The unfortunate fellow had lost his place. He swore, tugged at the rein; large drops of sweat rolled down his face. I can assure you his languid look had vanished. Already the *communeux* were beginning to notice him. A circle was formed round him, laughing at him; his position became dangerous. Luckily the head carter came to his assistance, tore the bridle from his hands with a rough push, then, with a lash of his

large whip, started the team, which rushed over the bridge at a galop, with the Vicomte running and splashing behind. The gate passed, he resumed his place, and the long



file was lost in the waste land outside the fortifications.

It was, indeed, a piteous egress. I watched it from the top of an embankment, the fields full of rubbish in which the wheels stuck; the scarce and muddy grass, the men bending low under the downpour, the long line of tumbrels rolling heavily, like hearses. It

might have been some shameful burial, as it were all the Paris of the *Bas Empire* disappearing, drowned in the mud of its own creation.

THE SUMMER PALACES.

Written during the Commune.

WHEN, after the taking of Pekin and the pillage of the Summer Palace by the French troops, General Cousin-Montauban came to Paris to be christened Comte de Palikao, he distributed among Parisian society, by way of the usual christening presents, the marvellous treasures of jade and of red lacquer with which his vans were loaded, and for a whole season there was a grand exhibi-

tion of Chinese curiosities, both at the Tuileries and in some privileged drawing-rooms.

People went there, as they would go to the sale of some *cocotte's* possessions, or to a conference of the Abbé Bauer. I can still see, in the faint light of the half-forsaken rooms in which all this magnificence was displayed, the little *Frou-Frous* with their massive coils of hair, crowding around, bustling among the blue silk strips embroidered with silver flowers; the gauze lanterns decorated with enamelled tassels and bells; the transparent tortoiseshell folding screens; the large canvas screens covered with painted mottoes; in fact, all the accumulation of precious knick-knacks, so thoroughly suited to the motionless existence of women with tiny feet. The visitors sat down in porcelain armchairs, ransacked the lacquer-boxes, the gold inlaid work-tables; tried on by way of amusement the white silk China crapes and the Tartar pearl necklaces; amid the sound of little screams of delight and suppressed titters, the noise of bamboo partitions knocked over by the trains of dresses; and from all lips the

magic words "Summer Palace" ran through the rooms like the flutter of a fan, opening to the imagination I know not what fairy-like avenues of white ivory and flowery jasper.

This year, society at Berlin, Munich, and Stuttgard has also had its exhibitions in the same style. For several months past, the stout ladies beyond the Rhine have been uttering "Mein Gott's," full of admiration at the sight of the services of Sèvres, the Louis XVI. clocks, the white and gold drawing-rooms, the Chantilly lace, the orange and myrtle boxes, and chests of silver, that the numberless Palikaos of King William's army have culled round about Paris, in the pillage of our summer palaces.

For they have not been satisfied with pillaging one palace. Saint-Cloud, Meudon—those gardens of the Celestial Empire—have not sufficed them. Our conquerors have penetrated everywhere; they have swept off everything, ransacked far and near, from the great historical châteaux, which keep treasured up in the freshness of their green lawns and their ancestral trees, a tiny corner of France, down to the most humble of our little white

houses; and now, all along the Seine, from one bank to the other, our summer palaces stand wide open, roofless and windowless, showing their bare walls and their denuded terraces.

It is especially towards Montgeron, Draveil and Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, that the devastation has been most terrible. His Royal Highness the Prince of Saxony toiled there day and night with his crew, and it appears that his Highness does things thoroughly. In the German army now, he is never called anything but "the thief." On the whole, the Prince of Saxony appears to me to be a magnate devoid of illusions,—a practical mind who, fully realizing that some day or another the Berlin ogre would make but a mouthful of all the little Tom Thumbs of Southern Germany, took his precautions in consequence. At present, happen what may, my lord is secure from starvation. The day his wages are stopped, he will be able, at his choice, to open a French bookstall at the Leipsic fair, or be a clock-seller at Nuremberg, or a pianoforte agent at Munich, or even a dealer in second-hand goods at Frankfort-on-the-Main. Our summer palaces have

furnished him with all these facilities, and that is no doubt why he conducted the pillage with so much animation. I can, however, less easily understand the fury with which his Highness depopulated our pheasant covers and warrens, and why he was so bent upon leaving neither feather nor fur in our woods.

Alas, for the poor forest of Sénart, so peaceful, so well kept, so proud of its little ponds full of gold-fish, and of its green-coated keepers! How thoroughly all those deer, all those pheasants belonging to the Crown, felt it was their home! What an excellent fat prelate's life they led! How safe they were! Sometimes, in the silence of a summer's afternoon, you heard a rustle in the heather, and a whole battalion of young pheasants ran out between your legs; while over there, at the end of a shady avenue, two or three deer wandered peacefully to and fro, like monks in a convent-garden. Was it possible to fire off a gun at such innocent creatures!

Indeed, the poachers themselves felt some scruples; and on the opening day, when M. Rouher or the Marquis de la Valette arrived

with their guests, the head keeper—I was going to say, the stage-manager—chose beforehand a few hen pheasants too old to breed, and a few chevroned old hares, who were directed to await the arrival of the gentlemen, at the cross roads of the *Great-Oak*, and who fell gracefully to their guns, crying out: "Long live the Emperor!" And that was all the game killed in the year.

You may therefore imagine the stupefaction of the unhappy animals, when two or three hundred beaters in greasy caps, came one morning, and threw themselves on their pink heather coverts, disturbing the coveys, tearing down the fences, calling out to each other from one glade to another in a barbarous language, and when in the heart of those mysterious coppices, where Madame de Pompadour used to lie in wait for Louis XV., the sabretaches and pointed helmets of the Saxon staff were seen glistening! In vain did the deer try to escape; in vain did the bewildered rabbits raise their trembling little paws, crying out: "Long live his Royal Highness the Prince of Saxony!" The hard-hearted Saxon would not hearken to them,

and for several successive days the massacre continued. At the present time, all is finished, the big and the little Sénart are both empty. The jays and the squirrels are all that are left, the faithful vassals of King William not daring to touch them; for are not the jays black and white like the Prussian colours, and is not the squirrel's fur of that tawny hue so dear to M. de Bismarck?

I received these details from old La Loué, true type of the Seine-et-Oise keeper, with his drawling accent, his knowing air, his twinkling eyes and earthy-coloured face. The good man is so jealous of his functions as a keeper, invokes so often and on every occasion the five cabalistic letters glaring on his brass badge, that the country folk have nicknamed him old La Loi, or, as they pronounce it in Seine-et-Oise, La Loué. When in the month of September we came and shut ourselves up in Paris, La Loué buried his furniture and his clothes, sent his family off to a distance, and remained to await the arrival of the Prussians.

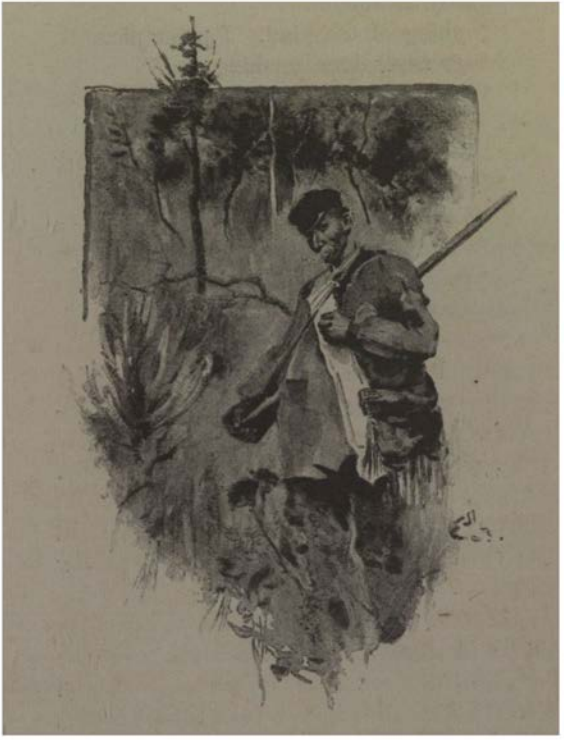
"I know my forest well," he said, flourishing his carbine. "Let them, if they dare, come and find me!"

Whereupon we separated. I was not without some anxiety on his account. Often, during that hard winter, had I pictured to myself the poor man all alone in the forest, obliged to feed upon roots, and having nothing to keep out the cold but a linen smock and his brass badge. The mere thought made me shiver.

Yesterday morning, I saw him arrive at my house, hale, hearty, and fat, with a fine brand-new frock coat, and the famous everlasting badge shining on his breast, like a barber's basin. What had become of him all that time? I dared not question him; but he did not seem to have suffered. Excellent old La Loué! He knew his forest so thoroughly! He may perhaps have shown the Prince of Saxony over it.

Maybe, this was an unjust thought of mine; but I know the peasants, and I know what they are capable of. The courageous painter Eugène Leroux—wounded in one of our first sorties, and nursed for awhile by some vine-growers in the Beauce country—related to us the other day a phrase that thoroughly depicts the whole race. The

people at whose house he lodged, could not



understand why he had fought, without being obliged to do so.

"You are, then, an old soldier?" they constantly asked him.

"Nothing of the kind. I paint pictures, and have never done anything else."

"Well, then! When they came to make you sign the paper to go and fight—?"

"But they never made me sign anything at all."

"Well but, when you went off to fight, it was"—and here they would look at each other and wink—"it was because you had had a drop too much!"

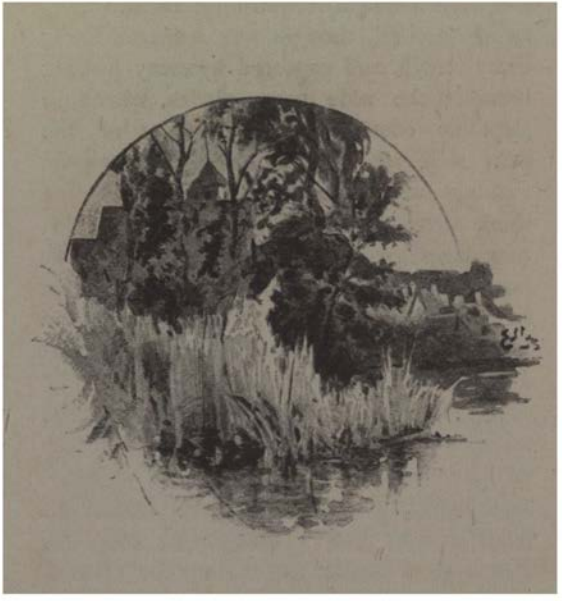
Such are the French peasants; those around Paris are even worse. There were a few good fellows in the suburban districts, who came behind the ramparts and shared our dog-biscuits; but as for the others, I mistrust them. They remained at home to show the Prussians our cellars, and to complete the pillage of our poor Summer Palaces.

My palace was so modest, so well hidden away amongst acacia trees, that it may have escaped disaster. But I shall only go and assure myself of the fact when the Prussians are gone, and even then, not till long afterwards. I want to leave the landscape

time to clear. When I think of all our pretty nooks, the little islets of reeds and slender willows where we so often went in the evenings and stretched ourselves out by the water's side, to listen to the sound of the tree frogs; the pathways full of moss, where, as we strolled, thought was scattered along every hedge, and captured by every passing branch; the wide grass glades, where we slept so comfortably at the foot of the oak trees, with a buzzing of bees above, making over us a dome of music; when I think that all this has been theirs, that they have sat down everywhere; then, this beautiful country seems to me worse than faded, worse than sad. This profanation alarms me more than the pillage. I fear lest I may no longer care for my nest.

Ah! if the Parisians, at the moment of the siege, had been able to carry back into the city the lovely country around it; if we could have rolled the lawns, the green roads, all purpled with setting suns, borne away the ponds all glistening underneath the network of the forest like hand-mirrors; wound up our little rivers on a bobbin like silver threads, and shut the whole up in a cupboard; what

a joy it would now have been for us, to put back the lawns and coppices in their place, to re-make an Ile-de-France, that the Prussians should never have beheld!



THE WRECK.

CHAMPROSAY, *May* 25, 1871.

Et voici le jardin charmant,
Parfumé de myrte et de rose.*

ALAS! this year the garden is still full of roses, but the house is also full of Prussians. I have carried my table to the further end of the garden, and there I write, under the deli-

* And here is the beautiful garden,
All scented with myrtle and roses.

cate and scented shade of a large bush of Spanish broom full of the buzzing of bees, which prevents my seeing the Pomeranian knitted jerseys hanging out to dry on my poor grey shutters.

And yet I had sworn I would not return here till long after *they* had left; it was, however, absolutely necessary in order to avoid Cluseret's horrible conscription, and I had no other asylum. And thus, I have not been spared, any more than so many other Parisians, one of the miseries of these sad times: the anguish of the siege, the civil war, the emigration, and, to complete our wretchedness, the foreign occupation. However philosophic, however much above and beyond every-day affairs, the impression is singular, when, after six hours trampling along the magnificent roads of France, all white with the dust of the Prussian battalions, you find on reaching your door, a German sign-board hanging under the falling clusters of laburnum and acacia, with the following inscription in Gothic letters:—

5TH COMPANY.
BOEHM,
SERGEANT-MAJOR,
AND THREE MEN.

This M. Boehm is a tall, queer, silent fellow, who keeps the shutters of his room always closed, and sleeps and eats without light. Withal, rather too free and easy manners, a cigar ever in his mouth, and most exacting! His lordship requires a room for himself, a room for his secretary, and one for his servant. You are forbidden to go in by this door, to leave by that other. Did he not want to prevent our going into the garden? At last the mayor came, and the Captain and we were once more at home. It is not cheerful at home this year. No matter how you look at it, this proximity disturbs and galls. Their hideous jargon heard all around you, and in your very home, mingles with all you eat, withers the trees, throws a mist over the leaves of your book, dims your sight, and brings tears to your eyes. Even the child, without understanding the wherefore, is under the influence of this strange oppression. He plays quietly in a corner of the garden, checks his childish laughter, hums in an undertone; and in the morning, instead of his joyous awakenings, full of delight and life, he lies quite still with his eyes wide open behind

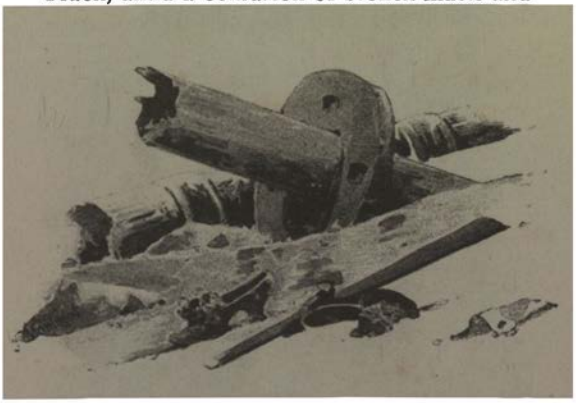
the curtains, and from time to time asks in a low voice:

"May I awake now?"

Would it were only the sadness of the foreign occupation that spoilt our springtide; but the hardest and most cruel thing, is to hear the constant roll of the cannon and mitrailleuse, which reaches our ears, when the wind blows from Paris, shaking the horizon, pitilessly tearing the rosy haze of the mornings, and filling with a sound of thunder those lovely clear nights of the month of May, those nights full of the song of the nightingales and the chirp of the crickets.

Last night was terrible. Loud reports followed one another rapidly, furiously, desperately, accompanied by perpetual flashes like lightning. I had opened my window looking towards the Seine, and I listened—with beating heart—to the dull sounds that reached me, borne by the deserted waters through the silence. At times, it seemed to me as though over there, in the distant horizon, some large vessel in distress were wildly firing off its alarm guns, and I remembered how ten years ago, on a night such as this, I was on the terrace of an hotel

at Bastia, listening to an ominous boom, sent to us by the raging sea, like a despairing cry of agony and fury. It lasted all through the night, and in the morning they found on the beach, amid a confusion of broken masts and



torn sails, shoes with bright-coloured bows, a harlequin's wand, and a heap of tatters and ribbons spangled with gold, drenched by sea-water, and daubed with blood and mud. This was, as I heard later on, all that remained of the wreck of the *Louise*, a large steamer coming from Leghorn to Bastia with a company of Italian mummers on board.

To anyone who can realise how dreadful

is a night's battling with the sea, the groping and sterile struggle against an irresistible force;

to anyone who can picture to himself the last moments of a ship, the rising abyss, the slow and inglorious death, the watery grave; to anyone who knows the rage, the mad hope

followed by a brutish prostration, the drunken agony and delirium, blind hands beating the air, clenched fingers clutching the empty

space; that harlequin's wand lying in the midst of bloodstained wreckage would have presented a burlesque and terrifying object. Imagination would conjure up a tempest

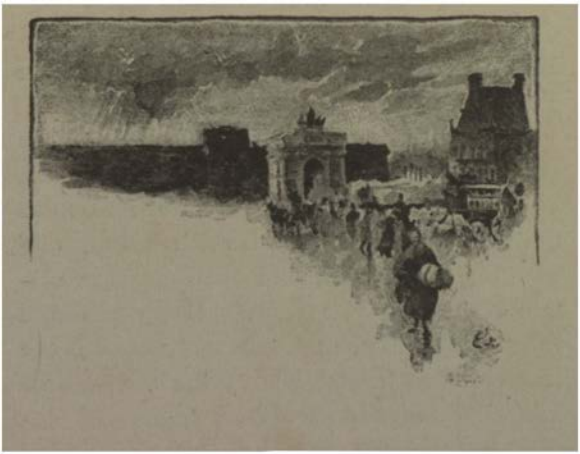
falling like a clap of thunder during a representation on board, the audience invaded by the sea, the orchestra drowned, desks, violins, violencellos, rolling pell-mell, the Columbine wringing her bare arms, running from one end of the scene to the other, half dead with fright and still pink under her paint; the Clown, even in his terror, not more ghastly than before, climbing up side scenes, watching the rising waters, and already in his great eyes, grotesquely circled for the farce, the terrible horror of death; Isabella, hampered with her gala attire, crowned with flowers, and dissolved in tears, ridiculous in her very gracefulness, rolling about on the deck like a bundle, clinging to each bench, and lisping childish prayers; Scaramouche, a barrel of brandy between his legs, laughing with an idiotic laugh, and singing at the top of his voice; while Harlequin, seized with madness, solemnly continues the play, jumps about and switches his white wand; and old Pantaloon, carried off by a wave, floats away on the billows, with his brown velvet coat and his toothless mouth wide open.

Well, this wreck of mountebanks, this funereal masquerade, this farce *in extremis*,

all these convulsions, all these grimaces, rose up again before me at each shock of last night's cannonade. I felt that the Commune, on the eve of foundering, was firing off its alarm guns. At each instant I saw the tide

rising, the breach widening, and all the while the men of the Hôtel de Ville clinging to their stage, continuing to issue decree after decree, amidst the turmoil of wind and storm; till at last, one big wave swept over them, and the great vessel was swallowed up with its red flags, its golden scarfs, its delegates dressed up as judges or generals, its battalions of gaitered and plumed amazons, its circus-like soldiers, decked out with

Spanish caps and Garibaldian hats; its Polish lancers, its fantastic Turcos, drunken and furious, singing and whirling. All this confused mass was vanishing helter skelter, and of all the noise, folly, crime, pasquinade, sometimes even heroism, nothing would be left, but a red sash, a military cap with eight galoons, and a braided frock-coat, found one morning on the bank of the river, all besmeared with dirt and blood.



THE STORY OF MY BOOKS.

LES ROIS EN EXIL.

(MONARCHS IN EXILE.)

Of all my books this is undoubtedly the one which cost me the greatest trouble to put into living form; the one that germinated longest within me, nursed in my brain, a mere title-page and vague outline, as when crossing the Place du Carrousel one October evening, it first flashed upon me like an apparition, in that tragic rent of the

Parisian sky caused by the downfall of the Tuileries.

Deposed princes taking refuge in Paris after their fall, lodging in the Rue de Rivoli, and in the morning sun with the shutters thrown back upon the hotel balcony, discovering these ruins, such was my first revelation of the "*Rois en Exil.*" Less a romance than an historical study, since romance is the history of men, and history the romance of kings. Not the historical study as generally understood amongst us, a dull, dusty, twaddling compilation, one of those ponderous volumes so dear to the Institute, crowned by it,—unopened,—each year, and on which might well be written: "*for external use only,*" as on the blue lotion bottles of the chemist; but a work of history in its most modern sense, living, penetrating, full of the most scorching and arduously won proofs, torn from the very entrails of existence, instead of being dug out from the dust of mouldy archives.

In my eyes, herein lay the difficulty of the work: in the hunt for models, for truthful information, in the weariness of the inquiries, necessitated by the novelty of a subject so

far removed from my own existence, from my surroundings, from my own habits of life and of mind. As a young man, I had often brushed against the ghastly black peruke of the Duke of Brunswick, haunting the narrow corridors of the night restaurants, in the hot breath of the gas, of patchouli, and of spices; at Bignon's I had a vision one evening, of Citron-the-Taciturn, on the divan at the back, eating a slice of foie gras, opposite to some woman of the streets; and again, one Sunday, at the doors of the Conservatoire, of the proud and haughty stature of the King of Hanover, as he emerged blind and feeling his way among the columns of the peristyle, on the arm of that touching figure, the Princess Frederica, who warned him when a salutation should be returned. Nothing, in short, but what was vague and shadowy: no precise notions, upon the home life of these refugee princes, upon the manner in which they bore their disgrace, upon the impression produced on them by their exile, by the atmosphere of Paris, or how much gilding yet clung to their court robes, and how much ceremonial remained in their chance lodgings.

To know all this, I needed a great deal of

time and journeys without number; I had to make available all the relations of an old Parisian, from the top to the bottom of the social scale, from the upholsterer who furnished the royal hotel in the Rue de Presbourg, to the noble diplomatist, invited as witness to the abdication of Queen Isabella,—seize on the wing the confidences of society, turn over the police reports, and the estimates of tradesmen; then, when I had got to the bottom of all these kingly existences, noted therein proud poverty, heroic devotion, side by side with unreasoning fancies, moral decrepitude, honour and conscience alike giving way, I put my inquiry aside, and only retained of it a few typical details taken here and there, traits of manners, of the general setting and atmosphere in which my drama ought to move.

Nevertheless, prompted by a weakness which I have already owned to, the need of reality which oppresses me, and which always obliges me to leave some stamp of actual life upon even the most carefully idealized of my productions, I transported my royal household from the Rue de la Pompe, where I had first installed it in the little hotel of the

Duc de Madrid (with whom Christian of Illyria had more than one point of resemblance), to the Rue Herbillon, not two steps from the great suburb and its fairs, where I intended Méraut to exhibit the people to Frederica, and to teach her no longer to fear them. As the King and Queen of Naples lived for a long time in the Rue Herbillon, it has been said that it was my intention to depict them; but I declare it was nothing of the kind, and that I merely paraded a royal couple of the purest invention, in an authentic setting drawn from reality.

Méraut, however, is taken from the life; he is real, at any rate half of him, and the manner in which I was led to put him in my book, is worthy of being recorded. Quite determined not to write a mere pamphlet, in which one of my puppets should plead the cause of legitimacy and divine right, I was trying to get up an enthusiasm for it, to recall to life the convictions of my extreme youth, by a study of Bonald, Joseph de Maistre, Blanc Saint-Bonnet, those, in short, whom Aurevilly calls "the prophets of the past." One day, in an old copy of the "*Restauration française*" bought upon the

quays, at the foot of an author's presentation letter, placed between two pages, I found this postcript, which I copy word for word: "If

you have any occasion for the services of a young man, eloquent and well informed, apply, *mentioning my name*, to M. Thérion, 18 Rue de Tournon, hôtel du Luxembourg."

Immediately there recurred to my memory this great fellow with flashing black eyes,

whom I had met soon after my arrival in Paris, always a pile of books under his arm, emerging from some reading-room, or studying the old bookstalls in front of the Odéon,—a long, lanky, shock headed devil, for ever settling his spectacles, with a never-varying gesture recurrent as a tick, upon a flat, open, sensual nose,—a nose in love with life. Eloquent and learned, indeed, and Bohemian too! Every shop of brandy-cherries in the Quartier must have heard him proclaim his faith in monarchy, and with sweeping gestures, a persuasive and sympathetic voice, hold his audience spellbound beneath the veil of smoke from their pipes. Ah! if I had only had him there, living, what a mainspring he would have been for my book! He would have breathed into it his fire, his vigorous loyalty; what information he could have given me about his stay at the Austrian Court, whither he went to educate the little princes, and from whence he returned, disillusioned, and his dreams for ever shaken! But he had disappeared years ago, poor Constant Thérion, having died from want; and unhappily I had met him, rather than known him; a mist yet floated before my vision in those

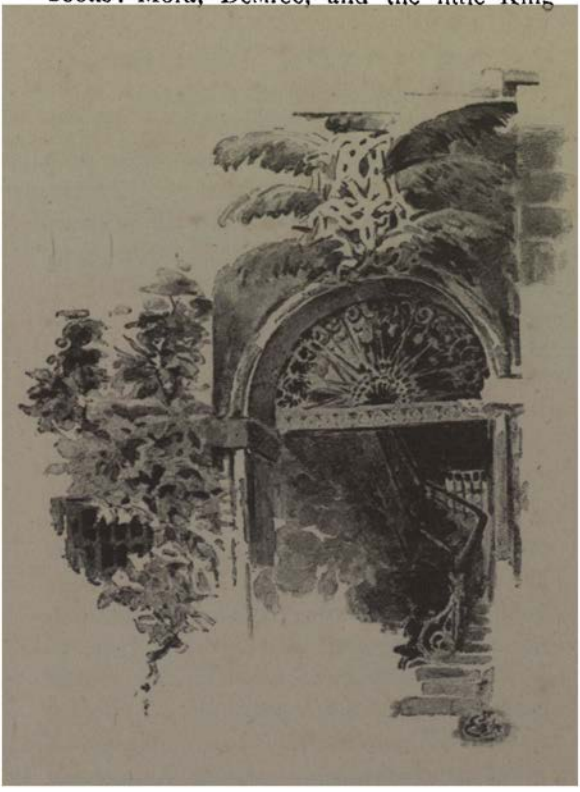
days; I was too young, more occupied with living than with observing. Then, to supply the detail about him which was lacking, the idea occurred to me, to make him of my own country, of Nimes, of that industrious little borough whence came all my father's workmen; to put into his room that red seal, *Fides*, *Spes*, which I used to see in my parents' house, in the dining-room where "Long live Henry IV!" was the toast sung at dessert, on all our family festivities; to surround him with those royalist traditions amid which I grew up, and which I kept intact till I reached the age when the mind opens and thought frees itself. Thus mixing in it my beloved South, and my childhood's recollections, I seemed to bring the book nearer to myself. Méraut once found, or Thérion if you like it better, what could bring him into a royal household? The education of a prince? hence Zara. And just at the same moment, an accident which happened in a friend's house, a child struck in the eye by the ball from a toy carbine, gave me the idea of the poor king-maker himself destroying his own work.

The visions of sleep are modified by the

realities of life. At a time when I dreamt a great deal, I had the habit of writing down my dreams in the morning, accompanied by explanatory notes: "Did so and so yesterday; said this; met such a one." Well! I might write notes of a similar kind on the margins of "*Rois en Exil.*" At the end of the chapter about the gingerbread fair, where Méraut carries the little frightened King on his shoulders, I should write: "Yesterday, visited Rue Herbillon.—Walked in the Saint-Mandé woods with one of my children.—Easter Sunday.—Noises from the fair.—We became entangled in the surging, moving crowd.—The child was alarmed.—I took him on my back to get away from the fair." Elsewhere, at the end of the chapter upon the heroic ball at the Hotel de Rosen, I should note that one day in the exhibition of '78, while I listened to the music of the Zingari and drank Tokay, the vibrations of the cymbals recalled to mind a Polish ball at the Comtesse Chodsko's, a farewell dance given in honour of those young fellows who then and there bade goodbye, and departed, some of them never to return again. And then, when a book is within one, when one

thinks of nothing else, what pieces of luck, what strange coincidences, what miraculous encounters befall one! I have mentioned the little note of Blanc Saint-Bonnet. Another day it was the law-suit instituted by the Duc de Madrid against Boët, his aide-de-camp, the pawned jewels, the order of the Golden Fleece for sale; then an auction at Tattersall's, the gala carriages of the Duke of Brunswick bought by the Hippodrome; next at the *Salle Drouot*, the sale of two jewelled crowns belonging to Queen Isabella. And it was on the day when I had gone to the same *Salle Drouot* to attend this sale, that a "masher," an idiot of the finest water, pushing his head between the shoulders of two Auvergnats, called to me in the swaying crowd: "Where is the lark to-night?"—a stupid catchword which I introduced to notice, and which has had the success of all such stupidities. Another time I saw, passing before the *Librairie Nouvelle*, the funeral of the old King of Hanover, conducted by the Prince of Wales. This funeral procession of a royal exile would have been a fine page to write, but unfortunately I was hampered by the burials in my preceding

books: Mora, Désirée, and the little King



Madou-Ghezo. But all this helped to re-assure me, and I felt that I was composing a

book of my own times, and appearing at the right moment.

I wrote the "*Rois*" in the Place des Vosges, in the depths of a great courtyard where patches of green grass cut up into squares the unequal pavement, in a little pavilion invaded by the sheen of a virginian creeper, a forgotten bit of the Hôtel Richelieu. Within were old Louis XIII. woodcarvings, gilding faded almost beyond recognition, a lofty ceiling some five yards above one's head; without, a balcony in wrought ironwork eaten by rust at the base. It was exactly the setting needed for this melancholy story. In this vast study I gathered afresh every morning the creatures of my imagination, living as actual beings, in groups around my table. The work was absorbing and tyrannical. I had no other outings than the daily walk, in the early winter morning, to escort my boy to the Lycée Charlemagne, through the muddy back streets of that corner of the Marais, Passage Eginhard, the Jews' quarter, in which was the busy secondhand shop of old Leemans, and where I was wont to encounter the well-combed work-girls, hook-nosed de-

scendants of Sapphira, bustling and laughing as they went Paris-wards. From time to time there was a drive into town, in pursuit of some information, in search of some house; Tom Lewis' den, or the convent of the Franciscans, in the Rue des Fourneaux.

All at once, when in the very heart of the book, in the full effervescence of those cruel hours which are yet the best in life, there was a sudden interruption, a failing of the overworked machine. This began while working, by short dozes of a minute or so, the drowsiness of a bird, a trembling of the writing, a languor, invincible and troubling, interrupting the course of the page. It was necessary to stop in the very middle of the task, to allow the fatigue to pass off. I counted on the kind care of the excellent Dr. Potain, on the quiet of the country, to regain strength and the elasticity of my over-strained nerves. In fact, after a month of Champrosay, of the intoxication of scents and verdure in the woods of Sénart, I was conscious of a well-being and an expansion that were truly extraordinary. Spring-time was awakening; and within me the sap of life was roused to fermentation, and seething like that of sur-

rounding nature, budding again with all the tenderness of youth. Never can I forget that avenue of the forest, where, under the thick foliage of the nut-trees and of the evergreen oaks, I wrote the balcony scene of my book. Then suddenly, without pain, I was seized by a violent spitting of blood. I was alarmed, I thought it was the end, that I must quit this life, leaving my task unfinished; and in a farewell, which seemed to me the final one, I summoned up just sufficient strength to say to my wife, the dear companion of all my good and evil fortune: "Finish my book."

Perfect immobility, a few days in bed, (cruel indeed with all this confused murmur of my book running ever in my head,) and the danger was past. Everything has its uses. Tourgueneff, shortly before his death, having had to undergo a painful operation, noted mentally every shade of pain. He wished, he said, to set it forth to us, at one of those dinners which at that time we were wont to hold with Goncourt and Zola. I, too, analysed my sufferings, and made use of the sensations of that moment of anguish for the death of Elysée Méraut.

Gently, and little by little, I took up my work again. I took it to the baths of Allevard, whither I was sent. There, in one of the inhalation-rooms, I used to meet a very original old doctor, very learned, too, Dr. Roberty, of Marseilles, who gave me the idea of the type Bouchereau, and for the episode which closes my book. For, sustained by the brave woman who guided my still hesitating pen, I arrived, notwithstanding all drawbacks, at the end of my work. But I felt that something was broken within me, that henceforth I could not treat my body as a mere rag, depriving it of movement and fresh air, prolonging evening till morning, in order to exalt it into the fever of glorious literary finds.

* * * * *

The novel appeared in the *Temps* newspaper, and then at the *Librairie Dentu*. Both press and public, and even the Legitimist journals, greeted it warmly. Armand de Pontmartin said in the *Gazette de France:* "I am ignorant whether Alphonse Daudet has written his book under a republican inspiration. What I do feel, however, what

in brief expresses my impressions after reading the book, is that in '*Rois en Exil*' there is much that is fine, touching, pathetic, and consoling, and that what compensates for the cruelty of it, what redeems this romance from the trivial ugliness of realism, is precisely the royalist sentiment. We are shown the energetic resistance made by some proud and lofty spirits to the general break-up, wherein balls at Mabille, the side scenes of the theatre, the Grand Club, the Grand Seize,* have swallowed up the vanquished royalties."

Amidst reviews that praised, came a hard rap from Vallès, who took the interior of Tom Lewis for an invention like those of Ponson du Terrail. This proved to me, what I knew already, that the author of the "*Rue*" knew nothing of Paris but the street, the street of the suburb, the pavement and its changing, swaying circulation of humanity; he had never entered the houses. Among other reproaches, he accused me of having betrayed and disfigured Thérion. I have already said that Méraut was not actually Thérion.

* The number of the Salon at the Café Anglais, where all the famous suppers took place.

In further proof, here are a few lines of a letter I received with a portrait, immediately after the publication of my book:—

"You must have had a great affection for our dear Elysée, to give him the place of honour in '*Rois en Exil.*' All who knew him will never forget him. Thanks to you, Elysée Méraut will live as long as '*Rois en Exil.*' Your book will henceforward be for me and mine a family relic and a friend."

The letter was from Thérion's brother.

Then the commotion ceased. Paris passed on to the reading of other works; as for me, I was satisfied with having written a book that my father, ardent royalist that he was, could have read without vexation, with having proved that I could still find words to clothe my thoughts, and that I was not completely played out, as my enemies had fondly hoped.

Several dramatic authors, however, wished to found a comedy upon my work; I was hesitating to give leave, when an Italian wrote a drama upon it for a Roman theatre, without consulting me at all. This attempt decided me. But to whom should I give the piece? Gondinet was tempted by it, but frightened by the politics. Coquelin, to whom

I spoke of it, told me he had some one ready; if I would confide the matter to him, he would let me know the name of my collaborator later on. I have a great affection for Coquelin; I have confidence in him, and I gave him my permission. He read the piece to me, act by act, as they were built up; I thought the work eloquent, the wording full of fire and breath, the dialogue well arranged. In the middle of the first act two words put in the mouth of Elysée Méraut, who says that Hezeta had "finished printing," put me on the track of the author. "It is someone from Lemerre's." It is well known, in fact, that the bookseller in the Passage Choiseul puts the names of the printers at the end of the fine poems he publishes. Thus it was that I discovered my collaborator, Paul Delair, a writer of great talent, a little confused occasionally, but with flashes of greatness—a true poet.

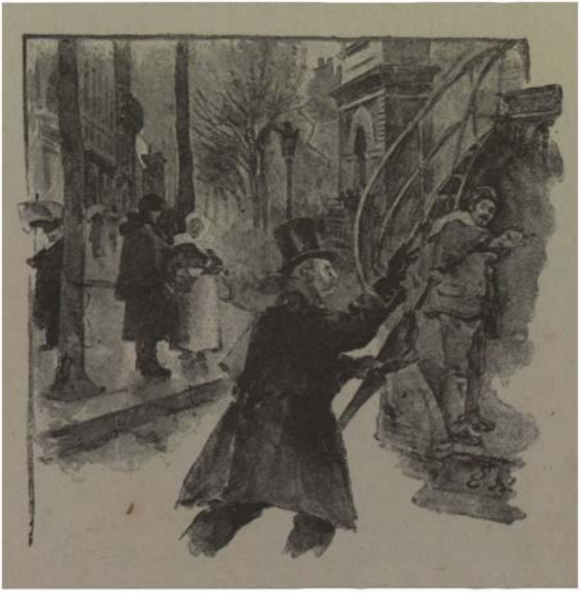
The play was to my liking, all but the last act, which appeared to me rather severe. It took place in the lodging-house, Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, at the death-bed of Elysée Méraut. At the end, the King Christian half-opens the door, saying, "Does Mademoiselle

Clémence live here?" In my little drawing-room, Avenue de l'Observatoire, when Coquelin read us Delair's work, all present shared my feeling. Gambetta was there that evening, as well as Edmond de Goncourt, Zola, Banville, Dr. Charcot, Ernest Daudet, Edouard Drumont, and Henry Céard. They were unanimous, and it was decided that the last act was too dangerous and must be altered. Delair listened, changed the ending, attenuated the situation; but it was labour lost, the play was condemned even before it was acted. I felt convinced of it at the general rehearsal. The piece was certainly well got up, the best actors of the Vaudeville were its interpreters, the manager had spared no trouble; nevertheless, I never saw a more hostile and critical house than that of the first representation. The next day, and all the succeeding days, it was hissed and hooted; *vide* the *Gaulois* of that date. Every evening the clubs sent delegates to make a disturbance. Whole scenes, in themselves fine and truly dramatic, were drowned in the tumult, without a word being heard. Passages like that in which a Bourbon is mentioned as running after an omni-

bus, were marked down beforehand. Ah! if they had only known from whom I had this detail! And the splendid entry of Dieudonné, the drunkard in dress-coat, while the heroic chorus of Pugno's march was going on! It became the fashion to go and make a row, just as at the *Salle Taitbout.* And then, under the fictitious indignation of the swells, there reigned in reality a great indifference throughout the house. The Parisian public, less monarchical than myself, remained profoundly uninterested in all these royal misfortunes; it was too far from their habitual conventionalities, as far removed from their pity as the sufferers from the Chicago fire, or the inundated inhabitants of the banks of the Mississippi.

Apart from a few independent writers, such as Geffroy and Durranc, the critics followed the public; such is now their *rôle,* and the play enjoyed a pretty general cutting up. Although Paul Delair's name alone appeared on the posters, it was I who for several weeks became the butt of calumnies and abuse of all kinds. In these cases I treat such insults as they deserve. By the multiplicity of newspapers, and the clamour

of reporters, the voice of Paris had become like a deafening mountain echo, increasing tenfold the sound of conversation, reverbera-



ting indefinitely, and smothering by extension, the correct note of praise or blame. However, I noted down one of these calumnies which I wish to correct. It was said that my book was written to flatter the govern-

ment; that, begun in favour of royalty during the "*Sixteenth of May*," it had veered round after the fall of the Marshal, and turned towards the triumphant Republic. Those who said this, those who fancied that the broad lines of a work, once laid down, can thus by mere caprice or even from interested motives be diverted to the right or to the left, have never written a book; but they should at least have reflected, and sought what object I could have in view to do what they accused me of. I want nothing, nor do I require any one; I live at home, I ask neither for place nor rank, nor preferment of any kind. Where then is the motive?

As for the reproach flung at me, of having written a pamphlet with a foregone and set purpose, that is not true either. The book and the play do not come up to the reality. I have given a fine part to royalty; if the part is not finer, whose fault is it? Monarchy sat for me; according to my custom, I copied from nature. Moreover, I was not the first who had remarked the weakening effect of exile on royal minds. In the admirable "Mémoires d'Outre-tombe," which lay on my table all the time I was working,

Chateaubriand relates infinitely more cruelly than I do, the silliness and infatuation of the court of Charles X. when in England.

"From her sofa, Madame watched through the window all that went on outside, and named the gentlemen and ladies walking past. A pair of little horses with two jockeys dressed Scotch fashion came by. Madame put down her work, looked at them for some moments, and said: 'It is madame (I forget the name) going on the mountains with her children.' Marie Thérèse, full of curiosity, knowing the habits of the neighbourhood, the princess of thrones and scaffolds falling from these heights to the level of ordinary women, interested me greatly. I observed her with a kind of philosophical compassion."

And a few pages further—

"I went to pay my respects to the Dauphin; our conversation was brief:

"'How does Monseigneur feel at Butscherad?'

"'Getting old.'

"'That is like everyone else, Monseigneur.'

"'How is your wife?'

"'Monseigneur, she has a toothache.'

"'Inflammation?'

"'No, Monseigneur, weather.'

"'You dine with the King? We shall meet again.'

"And I left him."

And what a condemnation was M. Fourneron's book: "*Histoire des Emigrés pendant la Révolution française!*" The attitude of the Comte d'Artois and the Comte de Provence in their exile, while their brother, a prisoner in the *Temple*, was sent to the scaffold; the rivalry of their mistresses, Madame de Polastron and Madame de Balbi!

My representation of the landing at Gravosa appeared incredible, monstrous, a fanciful invention. But read the history of Quiberon, the adventures of those unfortunate Vendean soldiers, to whom it had been promised that a Prince of royal blood should march at their head, awaiting, expecting the Comte d'Artois, who remained standing out to sea, not daring to land, and who wrote to d'Harcourt: "I can see nothing but Republican troops on the coasts." Those who made him see in this fashion, Baron de Roll and his friends, invented every day fresh pretexts to avoid disembarking. In vain did the

heroic Rivière, the Comtes d'Autichamp, de Vauban, and de la Béraudière insist: "I do not choose to carry on a guerilla warfare," replies the Prince. And then the story of Frotté and his mission, arriving in the midst of the whist-parties at Holyrood. He came to submit his plan of invasion. He was received in the presence of Couzié, of the Bishop of Arras, of Baron de Roll, of the Comtes de Vaudreuil and de Puységur, and the financier du Theil.

"Allow me," said Roll, with his German accent; "I am captain of the Guards, and therefore responsible to the King for the safety of Monsieur. Is there sufficient guarantee for Monsieur to run the risk?" "No, certainly not!" "Therefore," interrupted the Prince, "you yourself, M. de Frotté, recognise that the plan is impracticable."

Frotté went out, and returned alone to the gentry in Normandy, bearing with him one of those letters full of pompous phraseology, of which the Comte d'Artois was so lavish: "I charge Comte Louis de Frotté to express to you all the sentiments with which my heart is overflowing. Providence, do not doubt it, will second your generous constancy.

Awaiting that much-longed for moment, when I shall be able to speak to you *viva voce*, I remain, gentlemen,——"

This book is written by a royalist, who cannot sufficiently express his hatred against the Convention. Is there, in the whole of the "*Rois en Exil*," a single page as severe as this?

A READING

AT EDMOND DE GONCOURT'S.*

EDMOND DE GONCOURT invited this morning to Auteuil a few intimate friends, in order to read to them before breakfast his new novel. In the study, odorous with the enchanting smell of old books, and lighted up from top to bottom by the burnished gilding on the bindings, I perceive on opening the door the

* Written for the St. Petersburg "Nouveau Temps" in 1877.

robust figure of Emile Zola, Ivan Tourguéneff, colossal like a Scandinavian god, and the delicate black moustache appearing below the thrown-back hair of that excellent editor, Charpentier. Flaubert is missing; he broke his leg the other day, and at the present moment, confined to a couch, he makes all Normandy resound with his formidable Carthaginian oaths.

Edmond de Goncourt, the master of the house, looks about fifty years of age. He is a Parisian, but a native of Lorraine,—Lorrainer by his good looks, Parisian by his wit. His hair is grey, the grey that has been fair; he looks aristocratic and good-natured, with a straight and tall figure, the pointer-like nose of a country gentleman, and in the pale and energetic face lurks a smile which is always a little sad, a glance which at times lights up as sharp as an engraver's needle. What power of will in that glance, what sorrow in that smile! And while we laugh and talk, while Goncourt opens his drawers and arranges his papers, interrupting his task to show a curious pamphlet, a knick-knack brought from afar, while each one of us sits down and settles himself, I am seized with emotion at the sight of the

working-table, long and wide, the brotherly table, made for two, where death also came one day and seated himself as a third, carrying off the younger of the brothers, and brutally cutting short this unique collaboration.

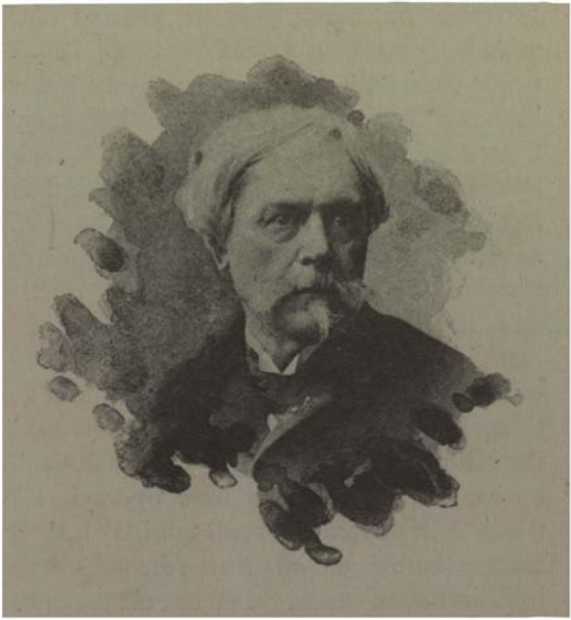
The survivor retains for his dead brother a feeling of extraordinary tenderness. Notwithstanding his natural reserve, which is augmented by a proud and watchful guardedness, he expresses the most exquisite shades of feeling when speaking of him, it is almost feminine. You feel under it all a boundless grief, something more than a mere friendship. "He was our mother's favourite!" he sometimes says, and that without regret, without bitterness, finding just and natural that so good a brother should have been the favourite.

It is indeed true, that such a complete community of existence had never been witnessed till then. In the whirlwind of modern habits, a brother, even before he reaches twenty years of age, parts from his brother. The one travels, the other marries; the one is an artist, the other a soldier; and when, from time to time, some chance

meeting around the family hearth takes place, they have almost to make an effort not

to meet as strangers. Even in a lifetime spent side by side, what gulfs are there not

created between two intelligences and two hearts, by the diversity of their ambitions and their dreams! In vain did Pierre Corneille



live under the same roof as Thomas Corneille; the first-named wrote the *Cid* and *Cinna*, while the second laboriously versified the *Comte d'Essex* and *Ariane*, and their literary fraternity was never carried further than to pass some paltry rhymes, from one

storey to another, through a hole cut in the ceiling.

With regard to the Goncourts, however, there was something more in question than mere borrowed rhymes and phrases. Before death parted them, their thoughts had ever been one, and it would be impossible to find twenty lines of prose that does not bear their twofold brand, that is not signed with their two names, inseparably united. A small fortune,—about five or six hundred pounds a-year for the two,—assured them leisure and independence. With that, they had organised a quiet kind of existence, made up of literary pleasure and work. From time to time, they made a great journey, in Gérard de Nerval's style, through Paris, through books, ever through the little by-ways, for these delicate and refined tourists had a sincere horror of all that resembles the regular beaten track, with its monotonous sameness, its sign-posts indicating the way, its telegraphic lines and its rows on each side of broken pebbles piled up in pyramids. Thus used they to start off, arm in arm, ransacking books and life, noting a detail of custom, an unknown nook, a scarce pam-

phlet, and culling every new blossom, with the same curious joy, whether it grew among the ruins of history, or between the greasy paving-stones of Paris faubourgs. Then, once more returned home to the little house at Autueil, like herbalists or naturalists, tired and happy at the same time, they poured out the double harvest on the large table; observations, fresh images, smelling of nature and greenery, metaphors vivid as flowers, dazzling like exotic butterflies, and there was neither rest nor quiet till all had been arranged and classified.

Of the two heaps they made but one; each brother wrote his page, then the two pages were compared, so as to complete one by the other and mould them into one. And by a unique phenomenon of assimilation in work, and parallelism in thought, the touching and charming surprise often presented itself, that with the exception of some detail forgotten by the one, or noted by the other, the two pages, written apart but lived together, closely resembled each other.

How came it that side by side with many too easily won successes, such a love of art,

such assiduous labour, such precious gifts of observation and descriptive power, could only obtain for the Goncourt brothers a tardy and grudging reward? Looking only at appearances, it seemed incomprehensible. But stop! these two Lorrainers, so eloquent, so enamoured of aristocracy, had been in art regular revolutionists; and the French public, always solemnly prudish on some point, only admits of political revolutions. By a passionate research through contemporary documents, by a curiosity for autographs and engravings, the Goncourt brothers have in history properly so called, and in the history of art, inaugurated a new method. If only they had adopted some speciality—in France any speciality is forgiven in the long run,—if they had remained historians, perhaps, notwithstanding their originality, they would eventually have been accepted, perhaps we should even have beheld this outrageous pair seating themselves under the dusty cupola of the Institute, by the side of the Champagnys and the Noailles. But no! devoting to the novel the same solicitude for exact information, the same scrupulous reality, are they not, since it is the fashion to be

leader of a school, the leaders of a young school of novelists?

Historians who write novels! This might have been admitted, if after all they had been historical romances, but novels such as had never been seen before, novels that were neither moulded upon Balzac, nor diluted from George Sand, but novels made up of pictures,—here we recognize our amateurs of engravings!—with plot scarcely indicated, and great blanks between the chapters, real break-neck ditches for the imagination of the *bourgeois* reader. To this add an entirely new style, full of surprises,—a style from which all conventionality is banished, and which, by a studied originality of phrase and image, forbids any commonplace in the thought, and then the bewildering boldness, the perpetual uncoupling of words accustomed to march together, like oxen dragging a plough, the earnest care in selection, the horror of saying all and anything; considering all this, how can one be astonished, that the Goncourts were not immediately greeted by the applause of the common herd!

The esteem of the learned, the admiration

that gives a consecration, friendships that are a glory, these were what MM. de Goncourt met with from the very first. The great Michelet wished to make these young men's acquaintance; and the homage with which he honoured them as historians, Sainte-Beuve in his turn rendered to them as novelists. Little by little, sympathy was gathered around them. During a whole year, all painters swore by *Manette Salomon*, that admirable collection of written pictures. *Germinie Lacerteux* created more stir, almost a scandal indeed. And the delicate, fastidious-minded Parisians remained astonished at the terrible light thrown on the loathsome back slums where the populace lived, admired the ball at the "Boule-Noire," with its irritating orchestra, and its mixed odours of pomatum, gas-pipes, and wine-bowls.

The descriptions of Parisian landscapes, since then so servilely imitated, but which at that time were in all the freshness of their novelty,—the exterior boulevards, the Montmartre hills, the walks along the ramparts, and through the chalky suburban districts made up of potsherds and oyster-shells,—all

this delighted many. The picture of this peculiar way of living, so near to us and yet so far off, boldly viewed and fearlessly set forth, gave a vivid impression of originality to all who knew how to read.

All this nevertheless was not the general public.

Theatrical authors pilfered from the Goncourts' books, which for a novelist is a sign of success. But these ingenious adaptations brought profit and fame to the adapters only. Outside a circle in reality somewhat restricted, after writing so many fine and excellent works, the Goncourts' name remained almost unknown.

An opportunity was lacking; then it offered itself. Fortune seemed at last to smile on them. A scholarly director, M. Edouard Thierry, received their *Henriette Maréchal*. Three long acts at the Comédie-Française! It was an important affair. At last they were going to meet face to face that indifferent and listless public, more insensible even than Galatea, and when it should be there, under their hand, it would be obliged *nolens volens*, to listen and to judge. A book, were it even a master-

piece, may not be read, but a play is always listened to.

Well no, this time again the public did not listen. It seemed a fatality, and a stupid piece of bad luck. It was rumoured about that the play had been imposed upon the director by a Princess of the Imperial family, the youth of the Quartier Latin became excited, and political feeling, repressed everywhere, and bursting forth whenever it can, exploded this time about the ears of the two inoffensive artists. *Henriette Maréchal* was played five times without anyone being able to hear a single word.

I well recall the uproar in the theatre, and especially the appearance of the green-room on the first night. Not an *habitué*, not an actor was there! All had fled before the disastrous blast. And in the shining and well polished desert, under the high solemn ceiling, and the gaze of the large portraits, two young men, quite alone, stood near the chimney, asking themselves, "Why this hatred? What is there against us?"—dignified and proud, with their hearts wrung nevertheless by the brutality of the insult. The elder quite pale comforting and cheering the younger,

a fair youthful figure, bright and nervous, whom I then saw for the first and only time.

Their drama was throughout a fine, bold, and novel production. And a short time after, the same people who had hooted it

frantically applauded *Héloïse Paranquet* and the *Supplice d'une Femme*, plays of rapid action, going straight to their issue, like a train at full speed, and of which most probably *Henriette Maréchal* was the inspiration. And was not the first act, taking place in the Opera ball, with its crowd, its abusive chaff, its masks joking and howling in pursuit of each other, that close approach to life and reality, ironic and real as a Gavarni sketch,—was it not "naturalism" on the stage fifteen years before the word "naturalism" was invented?

Henriette Maréchal had foundered; well, they would set to work again. And the two brothers again settled down in front of the large table, in their hermitage at Auteuil. First they wrote a study on Art, a monograph of the work and life of Gavarni, whom they had known and loved, animated as any novel, precise and full of facts as the catalogue of a museum. After that they wrote the most complete and undoubtedly the finest, but at the same time the most disdainful and most haughtily personal of their books: *Madame Gervaisais.*

Devoid of plot, the simple story of a

woman's soul, the wandering through a series of admirable descriptions of an intelligence overcome by nerves straying away from the free possession of self, to succumb at Rome, under the enervating influence of the climate, in the shadow of its ruins, amid that indescribable mystic and benumbing power that emanates from church walls, amid the perfume of incense and Catholic pomp. It was superb,—and an utter failure. Not an article was written on it; barely three hundred copies were sold.

This was the last blow. A sensitive nature, almost feminine in its delicacy,—the younger brother, already some time past affected by the beginning of a nervous disease, and sustained only by the fever of work and hope, could not bear the blow. Just as a glass of delicate crystal placed on the sounding board of a piano quivers and breaks, so something was shattered within him. He drooped for some time and died. An artist is not a recluse. However much he may keep aloof and above the crowd, it is always, after all, for the crowd that he writes.

And then one loves them, these books,

these novels, these struggling offsprings of one's very body, made with one's blood and one's flesh; how can one be indifferent about them? What strikes them, strikes oneself, and the most hardened author bleeds at a distance—as by a mysterious magic charm—by the wounds inflicted on his works. We affect to be of the refined, but are in the power of the vulgar; we disdain success, and the want of it kills us.

Can you fancy the despair of the survivor, of that brother left alone, dead you may say, himself, and smitten in one half of his spirit? At any other moment, no doubt he would have sunk beneath the blow. But the war began, the siege followed, and then came the Commune.

The noise of the cannon in this suburb, fired at from all sides, the whistling of the shells, the downfall of all things, the foreign occupation, the civil war, the massacre during the conflagration, the tumultuous Niagara which during six months rolled over Paris, preventing one from hearing anything else, drowning all thought, made him less sensible of his grief. And when it was ended, when the black fog was dispelled, and thought

again became possible, he found himself sad, incomplete, with a great blank at heart, astonished to find himself still living, but accustomed to life.

Edmond de Goncourt had not the courage to leave the little brotherly roof, so full of the memory of him he mourned. He remained there, solitary and sad; living only by almost instinctive toil, found in the care bestowed on his collections, and on his garden, having sworn to himself not to write any more, his

books and his table inspiring him with horror.

One day, hardly realising what he did, he found himself again seated at his accustomed place pen in hand. At first the task was hard, and more than once he turned round as in former times, to ask his brother a word or a phrase, but rose and left, affrighted at finding the empty seat. However a new and for him unforeseen thing,—success,—brought him back to work, and seated him again at his place. Since the days of *Madame Gervaisais* time had progressed, and the public also.

An advance had taken place in literature, in the way of careful observation, expressed in a strange and clear language. Little by little readers became accustomed to this novelty, which had at first startled them, and the real initiators of this remodelling movement, the Goncourts, became the fashion. All their books were republished. "If only my brother were here!" said Edmond with a feeling of painful joy. It was then that he ventured to write that novel, *La Fille Elisa*, the plan of which he had talked over with his brother.

It was not yet absolutely writing alone, it was a prolongation of their twofold work, a posthumous collaboration. The book was successful and sold well. It was a new triumph of sweet sadness in a renewal of grief, and more than ever the eternal: "Ah, if he were here!"

Nevertheless from henceforth the charm was broken, the literary man roused the disconsolate brother; and as Art always clings to life by some invisible thread, the first book he wrote all alone was the history of that dual existence, of that collaboration tragically torn asunder, of the despair of the living dead, and his painful resurrection. The book is called *Les Frères Zemganno.*

Touched, charmed, we listened with saddened hearts, looking outside through the clear window-panes, at the creepers and the sparse shrubs with their shiny lacquered leaves, in the little garden still green in spite of the season. A thaw had begun, starring the pond, damping the rockery, while the pale sun of closing winter smiled upon the snow. This smile, this sun, increased at last, invading the house. "Really? you like it? You are pleased?" said Edmond de

Goncourt, brightening up at our enthusiasm, and in front of the mirror, in his little gilded oval frame, the dead brother's miniature seemed to light up too, with a ray of tardy glory.

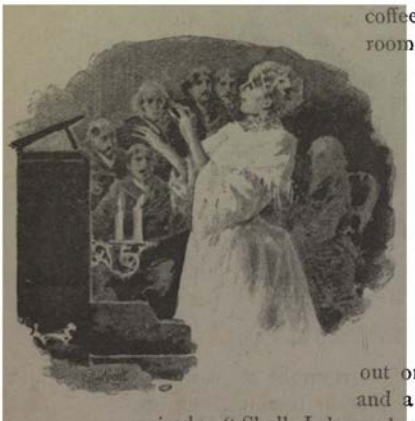
THEATRICAL CHARACTERS.

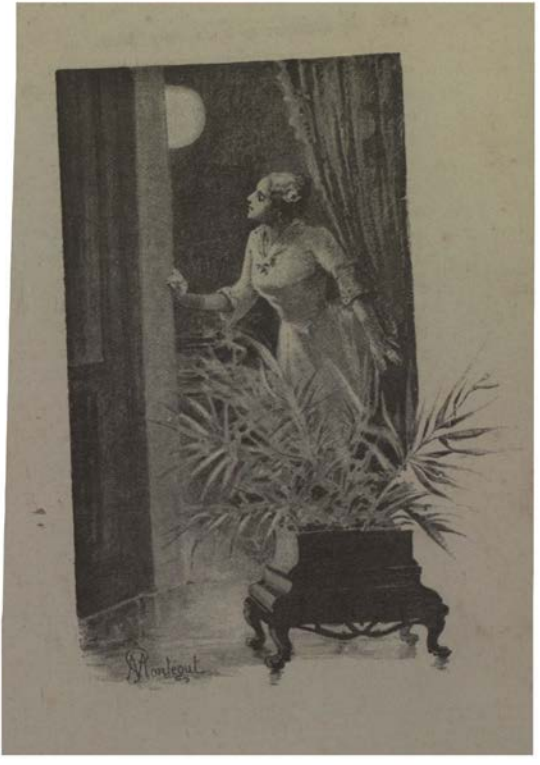
—♦—

DÉJAZET.

When I saw Déjazet on the stage, a long time ago, she was nearer seventy than sixty years of age; and notwithstanding all her art and all her charm, the narrow satins fell in wrinkled folds on her thin figure, the powder on her hair seemed the actual frosty hand of time, and the ribbons on her dress fluttered sadly at each movement, which, intended to be sprightly and gay, only betrayed still more the stiffening effect of years and

the chilled blood. One evening, however, the actress appeared to me to be quite charming. It was not at the theatre, but at Villemessant's house at Seine-Port. We were drinking our coffee in the drawing-room, with the windows wide open on a magnificent park, and a splendid clear summer's night. Suddenly, in a ray of moonshine, a little white figure stood out on the threshold, and a thin voice inquired: "Shall I be welcome?" It was Mdlle. Déjazet. She came in a neighbourly fashion, her country house being quite near, to spend the evening with us. Greeted with delight, she sat down in a reserved, almost timid manner. She was asked to sing. Faure, the great baritone, went to the piano to accompany her, but the instrument was



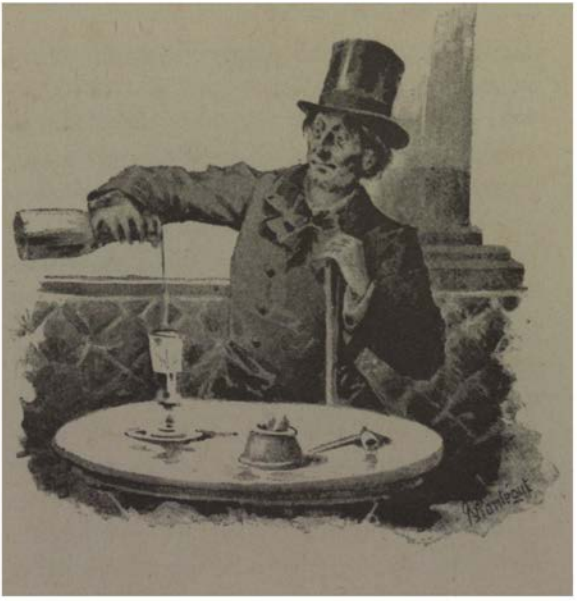

G. Montegut

only in her way. The softest notes, mingling with her voice, would have prevented our hearing her. She therefore sang without any accompaniment; and, standing in the middle of the drawing-room, the few lights of which flickered in the summer breeze, wrapped in a little white muslin dress that seemed to endow her with the vague age of a very young girl, or of a grandmother, she began in a little thin and tremulous voice, very distinct however, and ringing through the silence of the park and the night, like some mysterious violin :

"Enfants, c'est moi qui suis Lisette." *

And it is always thus that I see her, that I think of her.

* "Children, 'tis I that am called Lisette." A ballad by Béranger.



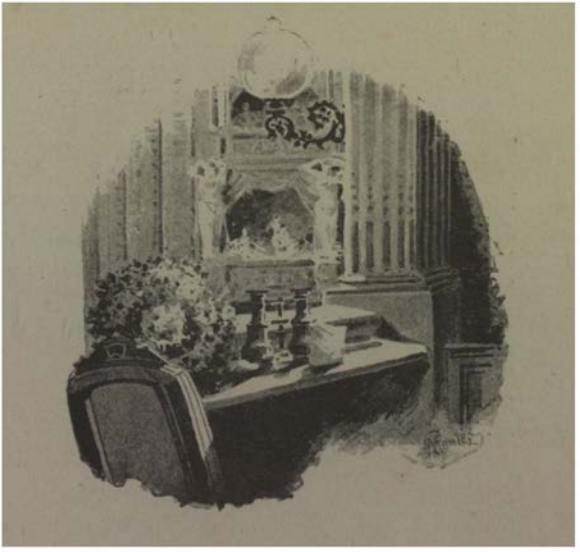
LESUEUR.

LESUEUR lacked too many qualities to acquire at the first onset all the authority of a great comedian. His voice was dull, veiled, of a poor metallic ring, that became harsh in his efforts at sonority. A faulty memory likewise troubled him, bringing him at every moment in front of the prompter's box. Lastly, his figure, slender, lank, almost small,

lacked that indefinable presence so necessary in moments of pathos to sway and to dominate the situation. Not only did Lesueur triumph over all these defects, but he thereby confirmed Régnier's theory, that to make a good actor, a man ought to be obliged to contend against some physical obstacles. The witty inflexions his voice was powerless to express, gleamed from his speaking eyes, and were impressed upon the audience by the details of his mimic art; and if certain sides of the character escaped him, there were never any gaps in his play, for he was always equal to the situation, and knew, what so many actors ignore: the art of listening. As for his figure, how did he manage to make up for its deficiency? However, undoubtedly in certain plays, *Don Quichotte*, for instance, he looked quite tall, and filled the stage with the breadth and amplitude of his gestures. Due allowance being made, in him, Frederick Lemaître seemed to live again. He donned all the different costumes of the human comedy with the same facility, from the rough jacket of the art student, to the burlesque purple of a fairy-tale king, or the dress coat of a worldling, with the same perfect

ease and equal distinction. Both also had in common a humour that lent to their creations something very exceptional, stamping their parts with an indelible mark, and making any revival after them very difficult. Ask Got, who is himself a perfect artist, what trouble he had to make his own the personage of the father Poirier created some forty years ago by the comedian of the Gymnase. When Lesueur played in a piece, the author might feel sure that even in case of a failure, all his efforts would not be lost, and that one part would always survive the wreck,—the part of Lesueur. Who would remember now the *Fous* of Edouard Plouvier, if he had not acted in it his magnificent absinthe drinker? How grand he was with his glass before him, his lips damp and quivering; holding up the decanter in his shaking hand, and mixing drop by drop the green poison, the effects of which could be distinctly followed on his besotted and pallid face. First, there was a wave of heat, a convulsive movement in the frozen skeleton dried up by alcohol, the cheeks became flushed, the eyes sparkled; but soon the gaze became once more glassy and

dulled, and the mouth relaxed and drooped at the corners. Marvellous as a mimic, he thoroughly knew all the business, all the hidden wires of the poor human puppets, and he worked them with such dexterity and precision! When he wept, every part of him sobbed, his hands, his shoulders. Remember how he scampers away in the *Chapeau d'un Horloger;* his legs darted forward, multiplied themselves, as if he had ten, twenty, thirty pairs of legs—a gyroscopic vision. And what a poem in his glance, when he awoke in the *partie de piquet!* Ah! Lesueur! Lesueur!

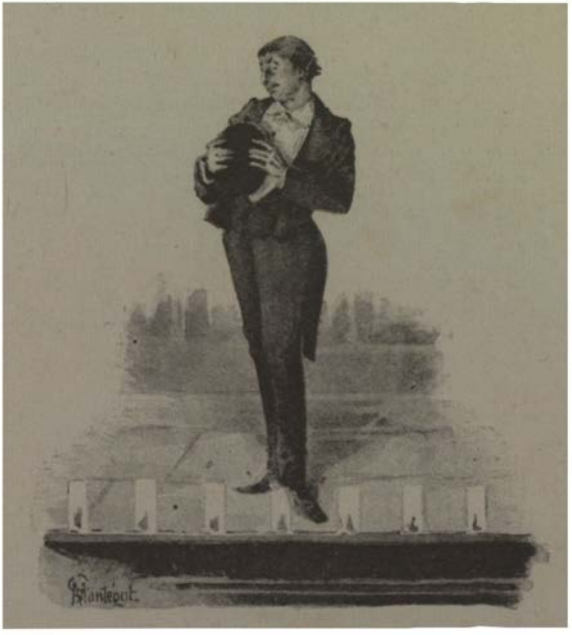


FÉLIX.

WHAT a strange figure that Félix was! While I write his name, he rises before my mind, foppish and thick-headed, with his round eyes, low square obstinate forehead, always wrinkled up in the effort to understand; the best of men, but the foolishness and vanity of a turkey-cock! One must have been associated with him in the work of

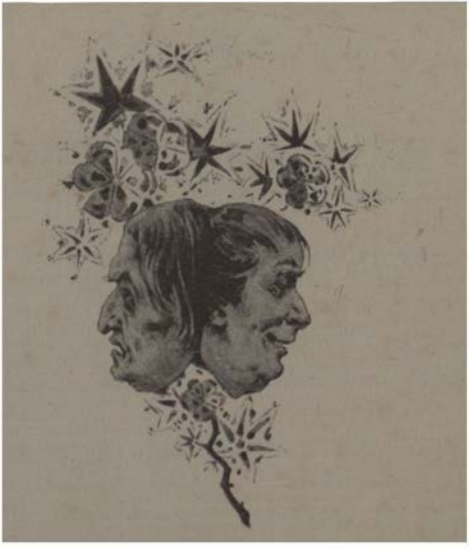
producing a play, to be able to realize it. First, directly after the reading in the green-room, Félix would go up to the manager's office, to give back the part that had just been handed to him, and which did not suit him. All the other parts in the play seemed to him excellent, except that one! He would, however, have been very much embarrassed to give a reason. No, it was a mania, an absolute necessity he felt to be entreated, to bring the authors to his little fourth storey in the Rue Geoffroy-Marie, in that little provincial home, tidy, cosy and neatly kept, that might have been taken for the apartment of a prelate or archdeacon, were it not for the innumerable quantity of portraits, medallions, and photographs recalling to the artist each of his creations. One had to sit down, to accept a glass of sweet wine, and strive by dint of eloquence, compliments, and fine phrases to overcome his exasperating affectation. At the first visit, Félix would not give any promise nor pledge himself. He would see about it, he would reflect. Sometimes, when he really longed for the part, he would say with a light, indifferent manner: "Leave me the play, I'll look it over again." And

heaven knows what the poor man understood about it. He would keep the manuscript a week, a fortnight, without saying a



word on the subject; at the theatre, they whispered: "He will play; he won't play." Then, when tired out with waiting, and seeing everything stopped by the caprice of one man, you had almost decided

on sending the great comedian to the devil, he would come to the rehearsal, cheerful, smiling, already knowing his part by heart, and lighting up the whole stage merely by his presence. But his freaks were not necessarily at an end, and until the day of the first representation, one might expect terrible rows. On that day, it is true, the incomparable inspiration of this singular artist, who became transfigured in the glare of the footlights, his unconscious effects, unerring and full of intelligent comprehension, his irresistible influence on the public, well repaid one for all the past annoyance.



MADAME ARNOULD-PLESSY.

Did you see her act in *Henriette Maréchal?* Do you remember her, in front of her looking-glass, throwing a long and despairing gaze at that mute and pitiless confidant, and saying, with a heart-rending intonation: "Ah, I look every hour of my age to-day." Those who heard her will never be able to forget it. It was so deep felt, so human! By

those few simple words, slowly accentuated, falling one after the other like the notes of a knell, the actress conveyed so much: the regret at departed youth, the bitter anguish of a woman who feels that her reign is over, and that if she does not abdicate willingly, old age will very soon come, and sign her renunciation by a disfiguring scratch across her whole face.

Terrible moment even for the strongest, or the most upright! It is like a sudden exile, an abrupt change of climate, and the surprise of an icy cold atmosphere succeeding the balmy and perfumed air, full of flattering murmurs and passionate adulations, which surround a woman's beauty in the meridian of her age. For the actress, the wrench is still more cruel. For in her, the coquetry natural to woman grows and is aggravated by a thirst for fame. And so most actresses never will make an end, never have the courage to place themselves once for all before their mirror, and say: "I look every hour of my age to-day." They are truly much to be pitied. In vain they struggle, cling despairing to the faded shreds

of the fallen crown, they see the public abandoning them, admiration replaced by indulgence, then by compassion; and what is more heart-rending than all, by indifference.

Thanks to her intelligence, thanks to her pride, the grand and valiant Arnould-Plessy did not await this distressing hour. Although she still had some years before her, she preferred disappearing at the height of her zenith, like those fine October suns, that plunge suddenly under the horizon, rather than drag their luminous agony through a dim and slow twilight. Her reputation has gained thereby; but we have lost many delightful evenings she could still have given us. With her, Marivaux disappeared, and the charm of his marvellous talent, of that sparkling and airy phraseology which has the capricious breadth of range of a fan unfolded to the footlights. All these delightful heroines with names like the princesses of Shakespeare, and who have even something of their ethereal elegance, have vanished and drawn back within the covers of the book; in vain are they evoked, they no longer

answer to the call. Gone, too, is all that pretty jesting with language and wit, that dainty talk, perhaps a little affected, a little over-refined, but so French, such as Musset has so often written; charming triflers, who lean arms, hidden under floating laces, on the edge of a work-table, laden with all the smiling caprices of an amorous idleness. All that is at an end, no one knows how to talk, how to flirt, now, in that sentimental style on the stage.

The tradition is lost since Arnould-Plessy is no longer there. And then not only was the artist both studious and methodical, a faithful interpreter of traditional French art, but this excellent actress had also an original and inquiring talent, whether she grappled with the grand tragic creations, such as Agrippina, which she played in a remarkable manner, more after Suetonius than Racine, or whether she created a part full of modern life and realistic art, such as Nany in Meilhac's drama—an ignorant peasant and passionately devoted mother. I remember particularly a scene in which to express the thousand conflicting sentiments

which clashed in her ambitious and jealous spirit, Nany, uncultivated, stuttering, seeking in vain for words, in a burst of mad rage against herself, gasped out as she struck her breast: "Ah! peasant, peasant!" The

actress said it in a way that made the whole house shudder. And remember that such cries, such truthful gestures, are not traditional, that no teaching can give them, but only a profound study, sympathetic and observant of life. Is it not a magnificent triumph, the proof of an admirable power of creation, that a drama that foundered like *Nany*, and was played only about ten nights,

should have remained for ever in the mind and eyes of those who saw it, because Mme. Arnould-Plessy had acted the principal part in it.

ADOLPHE DUPUIS.

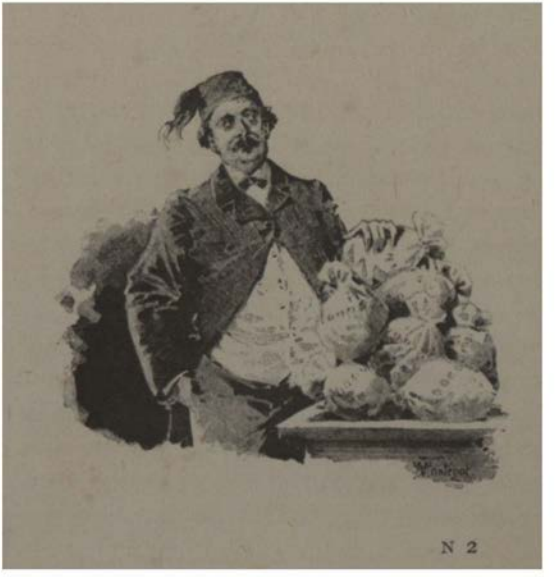
ADOLPHE DUPUIS is the son of Rose Dupuis, associate of the Comédie-Française, who left the stage in 1835, and died but a few years since. Notwithstanding a real talent, and dearly bought successes by the side of Mdlle. Mars, the excellent woman bore her former profession a grudge; and when, on leaving the Collège Chaptal, where side by side with Alexandre Dumas fils, he had been a very indifferent pupil, Dupuis expressed his wish to be an actor, the mother

opposed him with all the strength of her affection. We know, however, the meaning of "never" from the lips of a loving woman, and this one passionately loved her big boy. At the Conservatoire the pupil was not much more successful than at Chaptal. Not that he was deficient in intelligence; he had, on the contrary, rather too much, but unfortunately not of the kind that schools acknowledge, a sharp, personal intelligence, which reasons in the ranks, and questions a command of "heads right" when one is to march off to the left. In full class, the pupil discussed his master Samson's ideas, and resented the manner of preparing the work, by constant repetition with the professor, instead of leaving a little initiative to the pupil. Dupuis demanded that the examination should consist in a piece read out at sight and not coached up, learnt by rote for ten months beforehand, and in fact claimed that in the general plan of study a larger sphere should be given to natural talent, to the detriment of all tradition. Imagine old Samson's indignation at such subversive theories; notwithstanding all this, he felt a certain sympathy for the son of his old comrade, for the cool-

blooded but rebellious young spirit, with his good-natured smile; and he made him enter the Comédie-Française, as fifth or sixth lover in stock plays. Dupuis did not, however, remain there long. One day Fechter, who held the same position as himself, and hardly ever played, said to him in a low tone in a corner of the green-room: "Suppose we cut away from here? It is absolute death." "Let us be off," said Dupuis, and our two young gentlemen started off for London and Berlin, singing "I am Lindor" in all the four corners of Europe; badly paid, little understood, applauded at the wrong moments, but acting, having parts, that which is most precious to all young actors. Two years later, in about 1850, we find our comedian at the Gymnase, in the hands of Montigny, who was the first to understand all that could be made out of that fine, but somewhat slow and indolent fellow, and who mellowed and modified him by dint of hard work and constant and varied creations, making him up, either as an old man, or a working man, or a disputant, or a noble father, bringing to bear all his faculties of observation, shrewdness, sensibility, and good-nature, and that admir-

able accent of natural life, which no one else possesses in the same degree. After spending ten years there, on the morrow of the great success of the "*Demi-Monde*," in which he had a large share, Dupuis allowed himself to be tempted by an engagement in Russia; he stayed there a long time, too long in fact, for when he returned to us, after an absence of seventeen years, he had some difficulty in reconquering his public. It is the history of all those who return from the Michel theatre. It seems probable that the pitch is not the same at St. Petersburg as with us; they must speak more softly, play more discreetly, hint merely and never emphasise, just as in a drawing-room, among people who are acquainted with one another, and are easily pleased. In that manner both qualities and defects are blurred and attenuated. 'Tis true we recognise our artists, but the footlights seem lowered, and we see them dimly as through a gauze. On the evening of the "*Nabab*," however, the old Parisians found their Dupuis again, with all his former gifts, and even something more, a breadth, a width, an impetuosity of southern blood, that this peaceful father had not appeared capable

of. The day after that representation "Jansoulet" could have entered the Comédie-Française by the grand stairs, through wide-open portals, and no longer by the back door of his first appearances; but Samson's old pupil had kept his love of independence, his free spirit of early days, and the administration of the rue Richelieu thinking it derogatory to accede to his demands, the Vaudeville had the good fortune to keep its actor.



LAFONTAINE.

HENRI THOMAS, called Lafontaine, was born at Bordeaux in the early days of the Hegira of Romance. Bordeaux holds a place of its own in the French South. Anchored on the shores of the Atlantic, with bowsprit ever turned to the Indies, it is a Creole South, the impetuous South of the Southern Islands, which to the ardent imagination and vivacity of speech and impressions of the population beyond the Loire, joins an immoderate longing for adventure, journeying, *scampering about* in short. And this Bordeaux played an important part in the life and genius of our

comedian. "We will make a priest of him," said his mother, a true type of the mama of that country, Catholic almost to delirium; but scarcely was he placed in the seminary than the Bordelais scaled the walls, swapped his cassock for a blouse, and began a Little Red Riding Hood journey across the country, first in one direction, then in another, as the fancy seized him, until the wolf,—a wolf in a yellow shoulder-belt and a gendarme's hat—arrested him, and asked for his papers. Passed on from brigade to brigade, he was brought home, and his family wished him to return to the seminary. "Never!" "Well then, good-for-nothing, away you go to the colonies." That was a typical fury of Southern parents: "He won't be a priest. Zounds! we will make a cabin-boy of him then." Three months of lentils and salt junk, in the damp and the ocean gales, cured the young runaway of his travelling proclivities, without, however, giving him a taste for the tonsure. On his return from the island of Bourbon, he tried twenty different trades, and was in turns joiner, locksmith, pedlar of many goods, slept on the bare ground, suffered hardships and privations, going forward

through life at the prompting of his youth, and his wild Bordelais instinct, without aim, and yet always with his eyes open, and already possessed of the memory peculiar to the artist. Behold him now a bookseller's agent in Paris, trudging the streets, climbing up many stairs, a trader in literature and science, the mind full of titles and prospectuses, puffing books he has not the time to read, but which, nevertheless, leave a lingering smattering of knowledge about him; tenacious, insinuating, eloquent, irresistible, such an agent as the house of Lachâtre has never had before. Then, one evening he chanced to enter the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre, saw Frederick Lemaître, and felt that heart seizure known only to lovers and artists. He forthwith abandoned his books and reviews, and went to seek an interview with Sevestre,—fat old Sevestre, the governor-general of all the theatres of the suburbs. "What can you do? Have you played before!" "Never, sir, but only give me a part, and you shall see." In this fine Bordelais presumption, in the eager eyes, in the full gestures, the strong and metallic voice, Sevestre understood at once that there lay the temperament for the stage. This

temperament is common to the nature of the South, expressed in gesticulations, verbosity, putting everything in sight, expressing everything, thinking aloud, speech always ahead of thought. The man of Tarascon, and the man of the Porte-Saint-Martin, resembled each other.

In that little theatre of the Rue de la Gaîté, where, later on, Mounet-Sully made his début, Lafontaine served his apprenticeship. He played at Sceaux and at Grenelle, and as he rolled along in the omnibus to suburban theatres, declaimed Bouchardy, play-book in hand, all along the roads. He succeeded. The noise of his success crossed the bridges, reached the boulevard, and some time afterwards Henri Lafontaine entered the Porte-Saint-Martin to play in *Kean*, side by side with Frederick, who from the very first took a fancy to him, and made him work. "Come along, youngster," the master would say, as he left the theatre. And he took his pupil home with him to the Boulevard du Temple, exhausted by five hours on the boards, eyes full of sleep, cheeks burnt by the gas and the paint; but it was not to sleep! Supper was

ready, all the candles in the room were lighted. The meal was eaten in haste; then the master gave a subject for a scene, a dramatic situation to be rendered; and lying back in his armchair, a decanter of wine close at hand, said, "Now then, to work!"

That excellent comedian Lafontaine has often described to me one of these improvised scenes: "'Now then,' said Frederick, lolling back on his divan, 'you are a poor little clerk, you have been married three years. To-night, it is your wife's birthday; you adore her. In her absence you have prepared her a surprise, bought her a bouquet, arranged a nice little supper like this. And all at once, in laying the table, you discover a letter, from which you learn that she is faithless. Try to make me shed tears over this. Begin.'" Without delay, Lafontaine set to work, laid the table conscientiously, without any scamping—for Frederick would stand no trifling on the question of accessories—placed his bouquet in the middle of the table with little laughs of pleasure, eyes half dewy with emotion, then trembling with joy and impatience, opened the drawer where the surprise was hidden, found a letter, read it mechanically, and

uttered a terrible cry in which he tried to put all the despair of his shipwrecked happiness! "Between ourselves, I was rather well pleased with my cry," the worthy Lafontaine said to me, making merry at the recollection of his own misadventure; "it seemed to me truthful, genuine, full of emotion, I almost shed tears myself in uttering it. Well, instead of the compliments I expected, I only got a formidable kick, somewhere about the end of my spine. I did not put myself out much about it, for I was acquainted with the manners of my master; but his criticism struck me very forcibly. 'What! you wretch! You love your wife better than anything else in the world, you believe in her blindly, blind-ly, and yet at the first reading, you see, you understand, you believe all that this scrap of paper reveals to you. Is it possible?

"'Now, go and sit down over there and watch me distil my poison.' Thereupon he himself recommenced the scene, opened the drawer. 'Ah! a letter.' He turned it over, turned it again, glanced at it with careless eyes, not understanding it, threw it back into the drawer, and continued to lay the table. 'All the same, it is odd about that letter!'

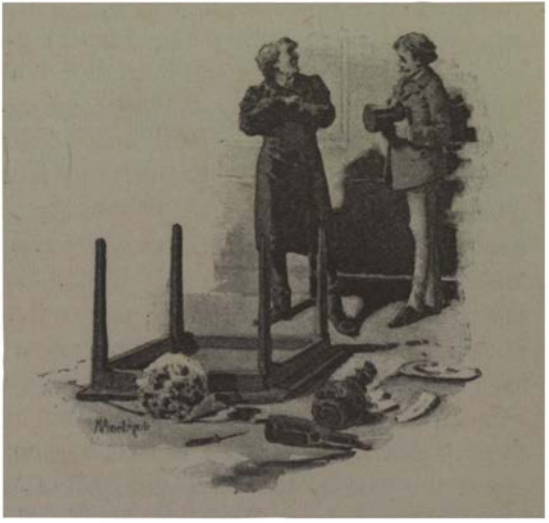
He came back to it, read it more attentively, then, shrugging his shoulders, threw it on the table. 'Nonsense, it is not true, it is impossible. She will explain it all to me when she comes in.' But how his hands trembled as

he finished setting the table! And always, his eyes upon the letter. At last he can bear it no longer, he must read it again. This time he understands it all, a sob rises to his throat, and chokes him; he falls gasping on a chair. It was a wonderful spectacle, it would seem, to see the features of the great actor become a shade more discomposed at each reading.

One could follow the effects of the poison, in the course of its absorption by his eyes. Then, once possessed by the fire of his own emotion, Frederick could not stop, but continued the piece. A startled movement of the whole body, a furious glance towards the door. His wife had just come in. He allowed her to come close to him without moving, and then suddenly, erect, terrific, held out the letter in his hand: 'Read that!' Then before she could reply, divining from the terror on this woman's face that it was true, that the letter had not lied to him, he turned helplessly round two or three times like a drunken creature, tried to utter a cry, could not, and never ceasing to love her, even in his rage, in order to vent upon something that should not be his wife the furious need of massacre, with which his hands seemed to tremble, he seized the table with both hands, and sent it rolling to the other end of the room with the lamp, the crockery, all in fact that was upon it."

This kick consecrated Lafontaine a great actor, and was for his faith, as a comedian, a confirmation from below instead of from above. Nevertheless, if he had had only the

lessons of Frederick, the artist from Bordeaux could never have learnt to regulate, to keep within bounds his wild and inherent vagabondage. His Southern nature bore him



aloft, but held him back at the same time. He had the brilliant power of improvisation with which it is endowed, but he had also the violence, the lack of measure, the clashing contrasts of sunshine and shadow. Thus nobly gifted, he might have missed his career, and have become a restless, crazy

sublimity like poor Rouvière; almost demented by his dual temperament of actor and meridional. Fortunately Lafontaine joined the Gymnase, and there had for ten years an incomparable instructor. Those only who have seen old Montigny in his place before the curtain, with frowning brow and surly mien, ordering the same passage to be begun anew ten times, twenty times, breaking the will of the hardest and most rebellious, never satisfied, always thirsting for the very best; those only can boast of having known a real stage-manager. Under him the talent of the artist became more disciplined. Montigny put like a *cangue* around his exuberant spirit the military stock of the *Fils de Famille*, the very same *Fils de Famille* that Lafontaine reproduced not long ago at the Odéon, and made him button up his meridional love of gesture within the gentlemanly frock-coat of the husband of *Diane de Lys*. The Bordelais was restive, champed at the bit; but he emerged subdued and accomplished, and to-day, when he speaks of his old master, his eyes are always dimmed.

NOTES ON PARIS.

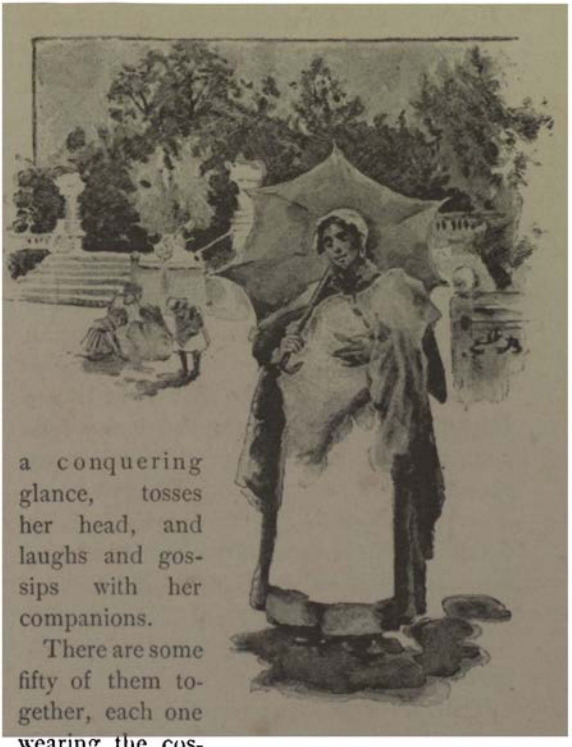
*LES NOUNOUS.**

NOTHING is prettier than the entry of the *nounous* and their babies, between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, in the gardens of the Luxembourg or the Tuileries, under the rays of the joyous spring sun, and the first quiver of the budding green.

* The wet-nurses.

In the sheltered nooks, where they usually meet, the nurses stroll about in groups of floating ribbons, or sit on rows of chairs protecting their babies under the large pink

or blue lined parasols, that throw so becoming a shade; and while the baby, fast asleep under the transparent veil and lace frills of its little cap, drinks in the spring air by every pore of its delicate little body, *Nounou* radiant, fresh, with a smile of ever-renewed maternity hovering on her lips, casts around



a conquering glance, tosses her head, and laughs and gossips with her companions.

There are some fifty of them together, each one wearing the costume of her province; costumes, however, so refined and transformed, that they lend

an air of old-fashioned and theatrical poetry to the solemnity of the royal gardens. The head-dresses are varied and superb: the bright-coloured handkerchiefs of the Gasconnes and the mulattoes, the nun-like caps of the Bretonnes, the enormous black bows of the Alsatians, the aristocratic coif of the Arlesians, the tall head-dress from Caux like the open-worked spire of a cathedral, and the wild-looking coils of the Bearnaises, stuck through with great gilt-knobbed pins.

The air is balmy, the flower-beds are fragrant, an odour of resin and honey falls from the budding chestnut trees. Yonder, near the pond, a military band strikes up a waltz. *Nounou* becomes excited, baby squalls, while the little soldier out for a walk, turns as red as the tuft on his shako, as he passes before this array of his country-women, whom he finds considerably improved in appearance.

This is the show nurse, as she turns out after a stay of six months in Paris, dressed up and metamorphosed by proud parents. But to see the true *Nounou*, to understand her

thoroughly, we must catch sight of her on her arrival, in one of those strange establishments called "*bureaux de placement*" (registry offices) where for the delectation of Parisian babies, thirsting for any kind of milk, the trade in foster-mothers is carried on. Near the Jardin des Plantes, at the end of one of those quiet streets which have retained a provincial air in the midst of Paris, and are made up of boarding houses, *tables d'hôte*, and tiny houses with little gardens inhabited by old scholars, small annuitants and hens, stands an antique building with a wide porch, and a sign-board on which pink letters display the simple word: "Nurses."

Before the door groups of women in tatters, listlessly lounge about with their infants in their arms. We enter; a desk, a grating, the brass-bound cover of a ledger, people waiting seated on benches; in a word, the eternal office, ever the same, equally correct and cheerless, whether at the Halles, or at the Morgue, whether its business be to forward a case of prunes, or to register corpses. Here the traffic is that of human flesh.

As we are immediately recognised to be "gentle folk," we are spared the waiting bench, and are ushered into the parlour.

A flowery paper decorates the walls, the red-tiled floor is polished like the parlour of a convent, and on each side of the chimney-piece, above two glass cylinders protecting bouquets of paper roses, hang the gilt-framed portraits in oil, of *Monsieur le Directeur* and *Madame la Directrice.*

Monsieur might be anybody, a retired private detective, or a chiropodist, who has made his fortune; Madame, plump and rosy, smiles over her treble chins, with the fat smile of an easy and profitable business, while at the same time her face wears the somewhat hard expression and glance, common to those who manage a human flock. Occasionally she is an ambitious mid-wife; more generally, however, a retired nurse, endowed with a genius for business.

One day, long ago, she also came to a house like this, perhaps this very one, a poor country girl, to sell a year of her youth, and motherly nourishment. She also had prowled

about before the door, famished like the others, with her child in her arms; like the others she had worn out her rough woollen skirts on the stone bench.

Now, times have changed, she is rich, renowned. In her village, which she left in rags, she is spoken of with respect. She is an authority down there, almost a providence.

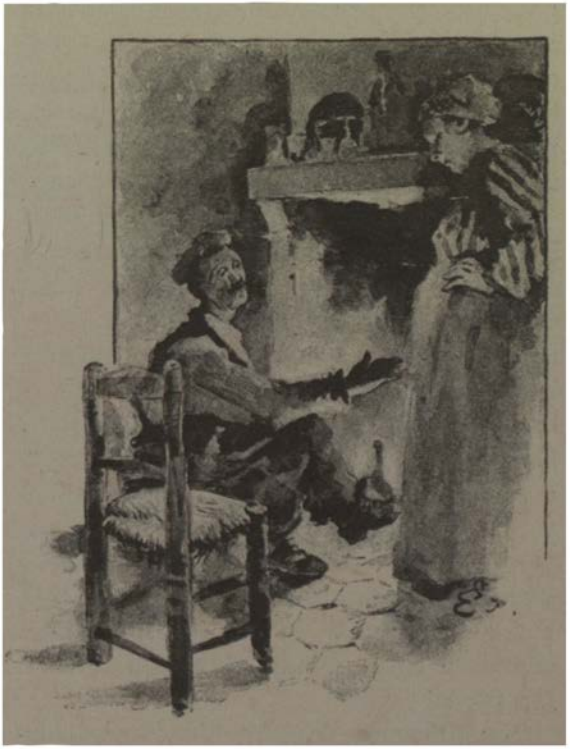
The crops have failed, the landlord has become pressing. In the chimney-corner, one evening, the peasant has said, spreading the broad palms of his hands before the fire: "Phrasie, listen a bit. Your health is good, money is scarce, suppose you go to Paris and hire yourself as a nurse? It won't kill you, and the mistress at the office, who is of our village, and knows us well, would find you a good place at once."

So she goes off, and after her another. Little by little, the custom is established, the love of lucre continuing what poverty had begun. Now as each child is born, its lot is clear, its destiny is marked out in advance. It will remain at home, and be fed by the goat, while the mother's milk, sold at a good

price, will buy a field, or enclose a bit more meadow.

Each specialist in nurses, each manager of a registry office, is in the habit of thus turn-

ing to account her own particular province. The one has Auvergne, the other Savoy,



another the waste lan ls of Brittany, or the wooded hills of Morvan. It is noticeable

that the fluctuations of the nurse-market in Paris follow those of country life. Rare in good harvest years, nurses abound in years of scarcity; however, whether the year be good or bad, the supply fails completely during the harvesting season or the grape-picking, at the moment when all hands are necessary in the fields.

To-day, the office seems well supplied. Besides the nurses we saw at the entrance, dragging along their wooden shoes, in front of the door, there are twenty or thirty under the window, in a little garden transformed into a yard—a dismal-looking place, with its boxwood borders trodden down, its obliterated flower-beds, and the babies' linen hung up to dry on a cord stretched across between a sickly fig-tree and a dead lilac-bush. Around this is a row of cabins, the sordid nakedness of which reminds one of negro-slaves' huts and convicts' cells. In these the nurses live with their children until a situation is found for them.

Here they encamp, sleeping on truckle-beds, in a sour atmosphere of rustic dirt, in the midst of the constant uproar of so many

babies kept in close quarters, who all awake as soon as one cries, and set up a concert of howls, with mouths outstretched for nourishment. And so they prefer being in the open-air of the tiny garden, where they dawdle about all day long, from one end to the other, with the listless air of half-witted creatures, never sitting down but to sew a little, to add a patch to some already many-coloured skirt,—a rag of special hue, earthy and grey, or else of the dull yellow or faded blue which Parisian fashion, by a subtlety of refinement, has borrowed from rustic poverty.

But here comes Madame, dressed to suit her occupation, at once coquettish and serious, with an avalanche of flame-coloured bows on the convent-like black of her bodice, her look severe, and her voice soft.

"You are in want of a nurse? Seventy francs a month? Yes. We have a good choice at that price."

She gives an order, the door opens, the nurses tramp in by batches of eight or ten, stamping about with the awkwardness of cattle, in their heavy shoes, nailed or wooden, and stand submissively in a row, with their

infants in their arms. These won't do? Quick, another batch, and in they come with the same downcast eyes, the same pauperised timidity, all with the same parched and tanned cheeks, the cheeks the colour of bark or earth. Madame presents them, and praises her wares.

"Sound as a bell; a real treasure. Just look at the baby!" The baby is indeed a fine child, it is always a fine child. Two or three specimens are kept in the establishment to take the place of those who might seem too puny.

"How old is your child, nurse?"

"Three months old, sir."

The baby is never more than three months old!

And Madame displays her goods, exposing to public inspection, with the authority of possession and the impudence of long habit, these poor scared creatures.

At last a choice is made, a nurse is engaged, now is the time to pay. The directress steps behind her grating and draws up her account. And an alarming account it is. First, the percentage exacted by the estab-

lishment, then the arrears due for the nurse's board and lodging. What more? Travelling expenses. Is that all? No, there is still the cost of the *meneuse* who is to take the infant from its mother, and carry it back to the village.

And what a sad journey that is! The *meneuse* waits until there are five or six infants, and then takes them away, tied up in big baskets, with their heads sticking out like a lot of chickens. More than one dies on the way, exposed as they are to the icy draughts of the waiting-room and the hard benches of the third-class carriages, with nothing but a little milk in a bottle and a bit of moistened sugar tied up in an old rag to suck. And the messages that are sent to the aunt, and the grandmother! The infant, thus brutally torn from its mother, throws itself about and squalls; the mother gives it a last kiss and cries. But we know that her tears are only half sincere, and that gold will soon dry them, that terrible metal, so dear to peasants' hearts. Nevertheless, the scene is heartrending and reminds one painfully of the family separation of slaves.

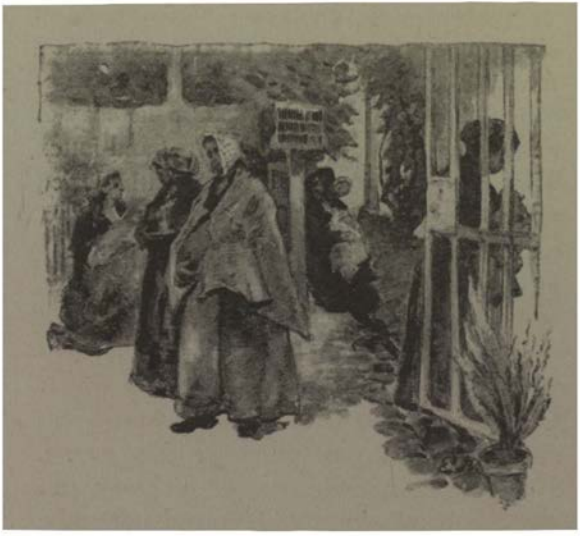
The nurse takes up her bundle, a few rags tied up in a handkerchief.

"What, is that all your outfit?"

"Oh! my good gentleman, we're so poor at home. I hav'n't really anything besides what I wear on my back!"

And in truth, that is little enough. The first thing to be done, is to clothe her, and fit her out. That was understood. It is a sacred tradition among nurses, as among freebooters, first to arrive empty handed, free from any encumbrance of luggage, and secondly to buy a large trunk, the trunk which is to contain the plunder. For in vain may you spoil her, and look after her, try to white-wash her sunburnt face, teach her a little French, a little cleanliness and coquetry; the wild creature you have brought into your family and whose coarse voice, incomprehensible dialect, and strong odour of stable and field, jar so strangely upon the elegances of a Parisian household, will always re-appear; and under the dainty varnish you may have succeeded in putting upon your *nounou*, notwithstanding every care, at every moment and on every opportunity the Burgundy or

Morvan brute will break out. Under your roof, at your hearth, she remains the peasant woman, the enemy brought from her dreary



home and squalid poverty, into luxury and fairy land.

She covets all she sees, and longs to carry it all off to her den yonder, where her cattle and good man await her. Indeed, she has only come for that, her one idea is plunder. *La denrée*, as she calls it, is really

a word full of surprises; and in the nurse's vocabulary, its elasticity approaches that of the boa-constrictor's gullet. *La denrée* is composed of presents and wages, what is given and what is paid; all that can be picked up or stolen, the odds and ends carefully hoarded which are to excite the envy of neighbours at home. To augment and fatten this sacred *denrée* contributions will be levied upon your kind heart, as well as upon your purse. And you have not only your nurse to deal with; but her husband, grandmother, and aunt are her accomplices, and from the recesses of a remote village, the very name of which is unknown to you, a whole tribe is busy framing the most treacherous red-Indian like designs against your property. Every week a letter comes, addressed in a heavy and cunning handwriting, with a seal of coarse bread stamped with a thimble.

At first you think them artless and comic letters, rather touching with their complicated spelling, their dressed-up style, their twisted and round-about phrases, that remind you of the peasant's cap twirled in his hand to hide his embarrassment; and the detailed addresses

like those Durandeau used to invent in his fantastic military portraits :

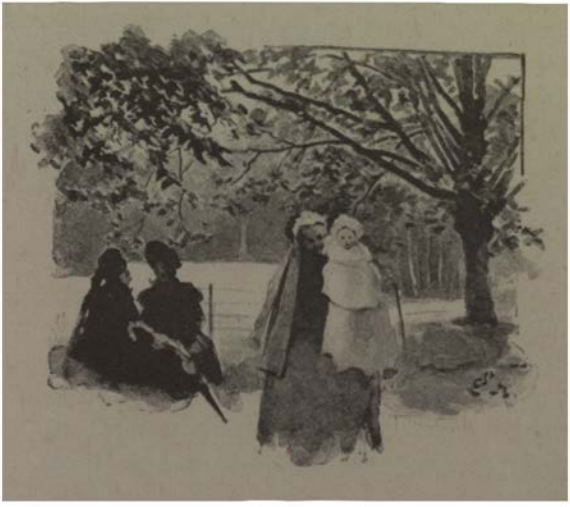
To MADAME, MADAME PHRASIE DARNET, *nurse at Mr.* * * * *rue des Vosges* 18, 3e *arrondissement, Paris, Seine, France, Europe, etc.*

But only have patience ! These flowers of rustic artlessness will not affect you long. All are aimed at your purse, all are redolent with the same perfume of rural trickery and intrigue. "*This is to let you know, my dear and worthy spouse—but you need not mention it to our respected masters and benefactors, for perhaps they might again wish to give you money, and it is never right to abuse kindness.*" And then follows the circumstantial account of some frightful storm that has devastated the whole country. All the harvest destroyed, the corn cut up, the meadows submerged. The house is open to the rain, for the tiles have been broken to bits by the hailstones ; and the pig,—such a fine animal, that was to have been killed at Easter, is pining away from the fright it had on hearing the thunder.

Another time, it is the cow that is dead, or the eldest of the little ones who has broken his arm, or the poultry seized with epilepsy. Under this single roof, on this small corner of a field, it is a continuous and impossible accumulation of catastrophes, equalled only by the plagues of Egypt. The plot is stupid, coarse, as transparent as daylight; no matter, you must appear to be taken in, pay and go on paying to the end or else beware of *Nounou!* She will not complain, she will ask for nothing, oh no! certainly not; but she will sulk and whimper in corners, taking good care to be seen. And when *Nounou* cries, baby screams; because worrying *gives a turn*, and then the nurse is good for nothing. Let us quickly send off a post-office order, that *Nounou* may once more laugh.

These important weekly strokes of business do not prevent the nurse from adding daily to her own little personal hoard. A few shirts for the little one, the poor disinherited brat, left alone at home to the tender mercies of the goat, a petticoat for herself, a coat for her man, permission to pick up the leavings, all the rubbish that would be swept

away. She does not even always ask for the permission, for *Nounou* has brought from her village very singular ideas concerning the property of those good Parisians. The same



woman who, at home, would not pick up a neighbour's apple through a hole in the hedge, will quietly ransack your whole house, without a qualm of conscience. For the Zouave, plundering an Arab or a settler, is not stealing. He calls it picking up, feather-

ing his nest. A vast difference! So also for *Nounou*, robbing the masters is nothing more than making a nest-egg.

Some years ago in my own home—for it is through personal experience that I can thus make such a dissertation about nurses—some silver forks and spoons disappeared. Several servants were liable to suspicion, and it became necessary to open their trunks and make a thorough search. As I had already made up my mind about the *denrée*, I began by *Nounou's* trunk. No, never did the hiding-place of a thieving magpie, never did the hollow of a tree in which a pilfering crow piles up its plunder, offer so incongruous an assemblage of glittering and useless things: stoppers of decanters, glass door handles, hooks, broken bits of mirror, empty bobbins, nails, scraps of silk, shreds of material, lead paper, linen drapers' coloured advertisements, and quite at the bottom, under all this *denrée*, the forks and spoons, now become *denrée* themselves.

Up to the very last, *Nounou* refused to confess; she vowed she was innocent, declared she had only taken the forks and

spoons to use as shoe-horns, not thinking it any harm. Nevertheless, she would not put off her departure till the following day. She was afraid lest we should change our minds and send for the police. It was raining, and night had set in. We saw her, silent and suspicious, once more a true savage, disappear with stealthy steps down the staircase, refusing all help, and dragging with both hands her precious trunk, loaded with its plunder.

Can you imagine what it is, to confide your child to the tender care of such brutes? Indeed, the most minute and constant supervision is not superfluous. If you allowed her to do as she liked, nurse would never take the baby out to quaff the sun, and breathe the fresh air of the squares. She loathes Paris, and would far prefer to sit over the fire, without a light, with the infant on her knees, and sleep her heavy peasant's slumber, for four hours at a time, her toes in the ashes, as they do in the country. Again, it is almost impossible to prevent her from keeping the baby in her own bed. Why should it have a cradle? These town folk really have the

most ridiculous ideas, such unreasonable wants! Would it not be better to have it there, quite near her, and feed it when it cries, without having to get up in the cold? It is true that occasionally it may be smothered in turning over; but then such accidents are rare.

Then also, it is traditional in the country, that a little baby can eat anything, and that it can with impunity be stuffed with sour apples and green plums. An inflammation sets in, the doctor is sent for, but the child dies. Another time it is a fall, or a blow which has not been mentioned, and the consequences are convulsions or meningitis. Ah! how much better would it be, if our Parisian mothers would follow the advice of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and nurse their babies themselves. It is true that it is not always easy or even feasible, in the debilitating atmosphere of large cities, which makes it a physical impossibility for so many mothers.

But what excuse is there for the mothers in the provinces, who, without necessity, from a mere habit of carelessness and laziness, send

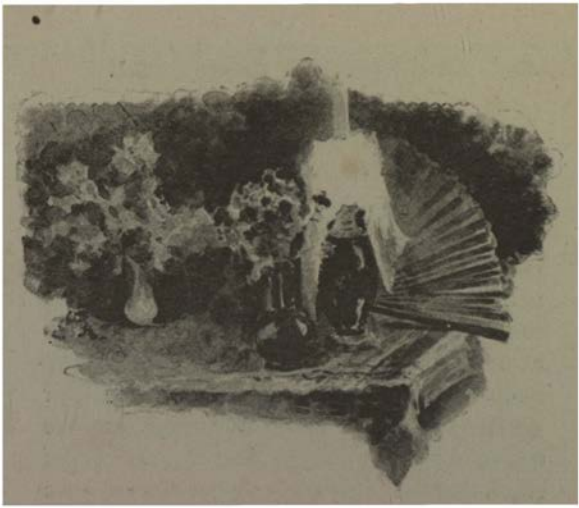
their children out to nurse for two or three years, confiding them to the care of peasants whom they have never seen? Most of them die. Those who survive, return home such little monsters that their parents do not recognize them, with their boorish ways, and their coarse mannish little voices giving utterance to all sorts of barbarous dialects.

I remember one day, in the country, in the South, some friends proposed an excursion to the Pont du Gard. We were to have a pic-nic on the banks of the river, under the shadow of the ruins. It happened that the "little one's" nurse lived just in that direction, and we were to see it on the way. Quite a large party was made up, the neighbours invited, an omnibus hired, and off we went, in the sun, in the wind, through the blinding and burning dust. At the end of an hour, we saw afar off, on the top of a hill, a brown spot standing out on the snowy whiteness of the road. The spot grew larger, came nearer. It was the nurse, who, warned beforehand, was looking out for us. The omnibus stopped, and the puling infant was handed in through the door.

"What a fine child! What a likeness to you. And he is quite well, nurse, your little one?" The whole omnibus full kisses it, fondles it, and then hands back the little squalling bundle out of the door again, and we dash off at a gallop, leaving nurse and child standing in the blazing sun, in the scorching, crackling ashes of the fiery southern road.

This is the way to make strong lads, you will say.

I should think so indeed; those who survive are proof against anything.



NOTES ON PARIS.

RIDICULOUS SALONS.

Amid all the follies of the day, there is not one as amusing, as strange, and as fertile in whimsical surprises as the mania for evening parties, tea-parties, and dances which, from October to April, rages throughout the different grades of the Parisian *bourgeoisie*. Even in the most humble household, in the most

retired corner of the Batignolles or Levallois-Perret, they must receive, they must have a reception-room, "a day." I know some unlucky people who go off every Monday, to take tea in the rue du Terrier-aux-Lapins.*

All this is well enough for those who have something to gain by giving these little festivities. For instance, doctors who are setting up and want to make themselves known in their quarter; parents without any fortune, who are trying to marry their daughters; professors of elocution, music mistresses, who receive, once a week, the families of their pupils. These evening parties always have an odour of the class-room, and the competitive examination. The walls are bare, the seats hard, the floors polished and carpetless, and a conventional cheerfulness and attentive silence greets the professor, when he announces: "Monsieur Edmond will now recite a scene out of the *Misanthrope*," or "Mademoiselle Eliza will play a *Polonaise* of Weber."

But besides these, how many unfortunate creatures receive without motive and without profit, simply for the pleasure of receiving, of

* Street of the rabbit-burrows.

being thoroughly uncomfortable once a week, bringing to their house some fifty individuals, who will only go home making fun of them. The drawing-rooms are too small, long but not wide, and the guests sitting and talking there, have the uncomfortable attitude of people in an omnibus; the apartments transformed, turned topsy-turvy, are full of passages, curtains and deceptive screens, and the mistress of the house constantly screams out in alarm: "Not that way!" Sometimes an indiscreet door half opens and allows one to see in the depths of the kitchen the master of the house, who has returned home, worn out by doing commissions, soaked through with the rain, wiping his hat with a handkerchief, or hurriedly devouring a bit of cold meat at a table overcrowded with trays. They dance in the passages, in the bedrooms, from which all the furniture has been cleared out, and where, on looking around and seeing nothing but lustres, brackets, hangings, and a piano, one asks oneself with dismay: "Where will they sleep to-night?"

I knew a very curious house in this style, where all the rooms, opening one into the

other, and each separated by two or three steps, looked like the landings of a staircase, so much so indeed, that the guests at the further end, appeared to be on a platform, and from their height humiliated the last comers, who were lessened and sunk up to their chins in the lower depths of the first room. Fancy how convenient for dancing!. No matter! Once a month a large party was given there. The divans from a little coffee-house opposite were hired, and with the divans, a waiter in pumps and white tie, the only person among the guests who had a gold watch and chain. It was a sight to behold the distracted mistress of the house, dishevelled, and red with all the fatigue of the preparations, running after this man, following him from room to room, and calling him, "*Monsieur le garçon! Monsieur le garçon!*"

And then the guests of those evening parties! Always the same set to be met everywhere, well acquainted with one another, ever seeking to meet, and ever clinging together. A whole world of elderly ladies and young girls with ambitious but faded

dresses; the velvet is cotton, glazed calico does duty for silk, and one feels that all these tawdry fringes, these crushed flowers, these worn-out ribbons, have been put together,

matched any how, with the audacious phrase: "Pooh! in the evening it won't be noticed." They cover themselves with powder, sham jewelry, imitation lace. "Pooh! in the evening it won't be noticed." The curtains have lost all colour, the furniture is frayed,

the carpet is in holes. "Pooh! in the evening." And in this manner they can give *fêtes*, and have all the glory of seeing, at three in the morning, some three or four cabs, attracted by the lighted candles, stop before the door; which, however, is not of much use, as the company generally depart on foot, following, at all sorts of impossible hours, the long track of the absent omnibus, the young girls hanging on the father's arm, their satin shoes rammed into goloshes.

Ah, how many of these ridiculous drawing-rooms have I seen! Through what strange evening parties did I not drag my first dress-coat, when, ingenuous provincial that I was, and knowing nothing of life but through Balzac's works, I thought it my duty to go into society! One must have roved about two winters running as I did, from one end of *bourgeois* Paris to the other, to know to what an extent this folly of receiving, in spite of all obstacles, may be carried. All this has now become rather vague in my mind. I recollect, however, a certain clerk's small appartment, an oddly shaped drawing-room, where they were obliged, in order to make

room, to put the piano in front of the kitchen door. The tumblers of syrup were placed on the music books, and when they sang sentimental songs, the servant girl came and leant against the piano to listen.

As the unfortunate servant was a prisoner in her kitchen, Monsieur undertook the outside work. I can still see him, shivering in his dress coat, bringing up from the cellar enormous blocks of coal, wrapped up in a newspaper. The paper would burst, the coal roll out on the floor, and all the while they continued singing at the piano: "*I love to hear at night, the sound of the oars cleaving the waters.*"

And that other house, that fantastic fourth floor, where the landing was turned into a cloak-room, and the banisters were loaded with coats, where all the ill-assorted furniture was crowded into one room, the only one that could be lighted and warmed. Nothing, however, could prevent its remaining dark and icy cold, notwithstanding all attempts to the contrary; by reason of the desolation and destitution one felt to be pervading the solitude of the other emptied rooms. Poor

creatures! At about eleven o'clock they would artlessly inquire: "Are you warm? Would you like any refreshment?" And they would throw the windows wide open, to let in the outside air, by way of refreshment. After all, that was better than the poisonous coloured syrups, and the dusty little cakes so carefully put by from one week to another. Have I not known the mistress of a house, who, every Tuesday morning, put out to dry on her window sill, little heaps of damp tea, that she used on two or three successive Mondays? Oh, when the middle class attempts to meddle with fancies that are beyond it, there is no knowing where it will stop. Nowhere, not even in full Bohemia, have I met any specimens so peculiar as in these circles.

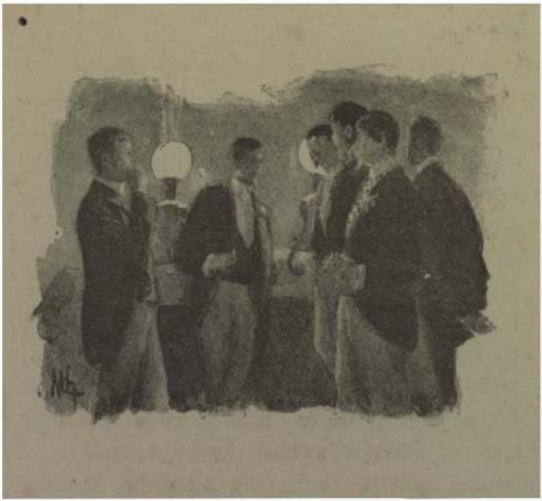
I remember a certain lady in white, whom we used to call the lady of the *gringuenotes*, because she was always sighing and complaining that she had *gringuenotes* in her stomach! No one ever could find out what she meant.

And that other one, a fat motherly creature, wife of a "coach" for law examinations, who

always brought with her, to ensure herself partners, her husband's pupils—all foreigners —a Moldavian wrapped up in furs or a long petticoated Persian!

And that gentleman, who put on his cards "World tourist," to show that he had been round the world!

And in a parvenu's drawing-room that old peasant woman, half deaf and inbecile, rigged out in a silk dress, to whom her daughter would mincingly say: "Mama, Mr. So-and-so is going to recite something." The poor old thing would move uneasily in her chair, and understanding nothing, would answer with a silly, scared smile: "Ah! well, well." It was in that same house, that they had the speciality of the relatives of great men. With an air of much mystery, they would say: "We shall have Ambroise Thomas' brother to-night," or else perhaps, "a cousin of Gounod," or "an aunt of Gambetta." But never either Gambetta or Gounod. It was also there—but I must stop, the series is inexhaustible.



IN THE PROVINCES.

A MEMBER OF THE JOCKEY-CLUB.

After dinner the worthy natives of the Cevennes insisted upon showing me their club. It was the usual club of a little country town, four rooms in a line, on the first floor of an old house which overlooked the parade, with great tarnished mirrors, tiled floors without carpets, and here and there, upon the mantel-pieces,—where the Paris papers, dated

the day before yesterday were strewn about,—were bronze lamps, the only lamps in the town which were not blown out as nine o'clock struck.

When I arrived, there were as yet, very few people present. Some old fogies were snoring with their noses buried in their papers, or playing whist in solemn silence; and beneath the green-tinted light of the lamp-shades, these bald heads nodding towards each other and the counters heaped in the little plush basket, all alike, had the even, yellow, polished tone of old ivory. Outside on the parade was heard the evening bugle, and the footsteps of pedestrians turning homewards, dispersing along the sloping streets and many steps connecting the different inclines of this mountain town. After a few last knocks inflicted upon the doors, and re-echoing through the prefect silence, the youth of the town, freed from the family meals and evening walk, sprang noisily up the stairs of the club. I beheld an invasion of some twenty solidly built mountaineers, in new gloves, vast shirt fronts, open collars and some faint attempts at hair-curling *à la Russe*, which made them all look like great

over-coloured dolls. You could imagine nothing more ludicrous. It seemed to me that I was assisting at a purely Parisian piece by Meilhac, or Dumas fils, played by amateurs from Tarascon, or from even some still more remote spot. All the soft speech, the ennui, the used-up, tired-out airs which are the height of good form among the Parisian mashers, I found before me, two hundred miles away from Paris, and exaggerated still more by the awkwardness of the actors. It was worth while to see these lusty fellows greeting each other with a languid: "How are you, old man?" sink down on the divans in attitudes of the utmost dejection, stretch themselves in front of the mirrors, and say with the strong accent of the country: "Life's a swindle! Everything's a bore." It was touching to hear them call their club the *clob*, which word, as good meridionals, they pronounced *clab*. One heard nothing else—"The *clab* waiter, the *clab* rules."

I was in the act of asking myself how all these Parisian absurdities could have got there, and have taken root in the keen and healthy mountain air, when there appeared before me the pretty little pale and curled

head of the young Duke de M***, member of the Jockey Club, the Rowing Club, the Delamarre stable, and of several other learned societies. This young gentleman, whose extravagances have made him famous on the boulevard, had just managed to get through the last million but one of the paternal fortune, and his guardians, seriously alarmed, had sent him to rusticate in this forgotten corner of the Cevennes. I understood at once all the languishing airs of these provincial youths, the display of shirt fronts, the pretentious pronunciation: the model was before my eyes.

Scarcely had he entered the room, then the member of the Jockey Club was surrounded and made much of. His witticisms were repeated, his gestures and attitudes were copied, so much so that this pale shadow of a dandy, fagged, unhealthy, yet distinguished looking in spite of all, seemed to be reflected in every direction, in coarse countrified mirrors which grossly exaggerated his features. That evening, no doubt in my honour, the Duke talked a great deal of literature, and of the theatre. But, good heavens, with what contempt! what ignorance! It was enough

to hear him call Emile Augier "that gentleman," and Dumas fils "little Dumas." The vaguest ideas about everything floated amongst unfinished phrases, wherein *what's his name*, and *what d'you call 'em* stood in place of words he could not find, and held the same position as those lines of dots so much in favour with dramatic authors, who do not know how to write. In short, this young gentleman had never given himself the trouble of thinking; but he had mixed much in the world, and from the wild circle of his acquaintance had carried away an expression here, a judgment there, superficially preserved and forming a part of himself, as much as the curls that shaded his delicate forehead. What, however, he did most thoroughly understand, was heraldry, liveries, light women and race-horses; and on these points, the young provincials whose education he had undertaken, were becoming almost as learned as himself.

The evening wore heavily away amid the prattlings of this melancholy stable man. Towards ten o'clock, the old men having left, and the whist tables being deserted, the younger men seated themselves for a

little *baccarat*. It had become the correct thing since the Duke had been among them. I had taken up a position in the shade, on a corner of the divan, and from thence I had a good view of all the players, under the shaded and concentrated light of the lamps. The member of the Jockey Club was enthroned in the centre of the group around the table, superbly indifferent, holding his cards with perfect grace and caring little whether he won or lost. This Parisian with pockets cleared out was yet the wealthiest of the party. But they, poor fledgelings, what an effort of courage it cost them to affect impassibility! As the excitement of the game increased, I followed with curiosity the expressions of the various faces. I saw lips tremble, eyes fill with tears, fingers close with feverish agitation upon the cards. To conceal their emotion, the losers uttered an occasional ejaculation amid their bad luck, "I've lost my head, I'm dreadfully bored;" but uttered in the terrible meridional accent, always so emphatic and so hard, these Parisian exclamations had no longer the air of aristocratic indifference which they wore on the lips of the little Duke.

Among the players was one in particular who interested me. He was a tall youth, very young, who had grown too quickly, the big good-natured face of a bearded child, simple, unpolished and primitive, notwith-

standing all his *Demidoff* curls, and on whose open countenance every passing impression was easy to read. This lad lost continually. Two or three times I had noticed him rise from the table and leave the room quickly; then after a few minutes, he would return to his place, red and perspiring, and I said to myself: "You have been to your mother, or sisters with some pitiful tale, to get money from them." The fact is, that each time, the poor devil returned with full pockets, and

resumed play with redoubled fury. But luck was persistently against him. He lost, he lost incessantly. I felt him to be trembling, every nerve tingling, no longer having even the power to put a good face upon misfortune. As each card fell, he dug his nails into the woollen cloth: it was heart-rending.

Gradually hypnotised, however, by the atmosphere of provincial ennui and idleness, very tired too by my journey, I only beheld the card-table as a very faint and vague luminous vision, and I ended by falling asleep, to the murmur of voices and shuffled cards. I was awakened suddenly by a noise of angry words, sounding loud in the empty rooms. Everyone was gone. There remained only the member of the Jockey Club and the great boy in whom I had been interested, both seated at the table and playing. The game was serious, *écarté* at ten louis (eight pounds), and it was enough to see the despair depicted on the great good-natured bull-dog face, to understand that the mountaineer was still losing.

"My revenge," he cried with rage, from time to time. The other held his own; and at each fresh stroke of luck, it seemed to me

that an evil smile, disdainful and almost imperceptible, curled his aristocratic lip. I heard him announce "the conqueror!" then there was a violent blow of the fist upon the table; it was all over, the unfortunate wretch had lost everything.

He remained for a moment stunned, looking at his cards without a word, his frock-coat hunched up, his shirt front rumpled and damp as if he had been fighting. Then, all at once, seeing the Duke picking up the gold pieces scattered on the cloth, he rose with a terrible cry: "My money! Good God! Give me back my money!" and then like the child he still was, he began to sob: "Give it back to me, give it back to me!" Ah! I can assure you he lisped no longer, his natural voice had returned to him; affecting as that of all strong beings to whom tears come rarely and are a true suffering. Still cold, still ironical, his adversary watched him without moving a muscle. Then the poor fellow went down upon his knees, and said quite low, in a voice that trembled: "That money was not mine. I stole it. My father left it with me to meet a bill." Suffocated by shame, he could say no more.

At the first mention of stolen money, the Duke had risen. A faint animation glowed in his cheeks. The head assumed an expression of pride which became him well. He emptied his pockets on the table, and himself dropping for a moment his dandy's mask, he said, in a kind and natural voice: "Take it back, you idiot. Did you suppose we were playing seriously?"

I could have hugged that true gentleman!

THE GUÉRANDE RACES.

First of all, let us tarry a while in the charming and uncommon little town of Guérande, so picturesque with its ancient ramparts flanked by big towers, and its moats filled with moss-green water. Between the old stones, wild veronicas flower in great nosegays; everywhere ivy entwines itself, westeria creeps its serpentine course, and terraced gardens hang over the battlements masses of roses and cascades of clematis.

From the moment that you plunge beneath the postern gate, with its round low arch, where the bells of the post-horses tinkle merrily, you enter upon a new country, into an epoch of some five-hundred years ago. The doors open from under Gothic archways, the antique houses are of irregular frontage, the higher stories overhanging the lower; with deep lines on the stonework and ornamentations defaced and worn by the hand of time. In certain silent by-streets old manor-houses stand out, with high windows lighted by narrow panes. The seignorial gates are closed now, but between their disjointed timbers, one can see the steps invaded by verdure, the clumps of hydrangeas at the entrance, and the courtyard full of grass, where some crumbling wall, some ruins of a chapel, add still more to the accumulation of stones and green efflorescence. For this sets forth the whole character of Guérande, —a flowery and coquettish ruin.

Here and there, above a worn and venerable knocker, is displayed the honest and vulgar escutcheon of a notary or a sheriff's officer, or the placard of a post-office; but, for the most part, these ancient dwellings have

kept their aristocratic impress, and on due search one may find some of the great names of Brittany, buried in the silence of this little corner, which in itself is the past personified. There, indeed, a dreamy silence has its home. It watches round the fourteenth-century church, where the fruit-sellers shelter their flat baskets and knit mutely. It hovers over the deserted alleys, the moat of stagnant water, the calm streets traversed from time to time by a herds-woman leading her cow, barefooted, a rope for girdle round her waist, and a headgear of Joan of Arc's time.

On the day of the races, needless to say, the whole aspect of the town changes. There is a continual coming and going of carriages, bringing the bathers from Le Croisic or Le Pouliguen, both men and women. There are carts full of peasants, huge antique coaches which look as if they had rolled out of a fairy tale, hired vehicles in which may be perched some old dowager of the neighbourhood, between her bed-chamber woman in the cap of the country, and her page in wooden shoes. All these will have arrived in the early morning in time for high mass.

The sound of the bells is wafted through the narrow streets mingled with the click of the barber's scissors; and the well-filled church makes the town a desert for a couple of hours. At midday, at the first stroke of the Angelus, the doors open and the crowd pours out into the tiny square, amidst the importunate murmur of the beggars clustered about the porch, whose voices all burst forth at the same moment. It is a wild medley of all sorts of church chants: Litanies, Credos, Pater Nosters; a display of sores, infirmities, and leprosy worthy of the middle ages. The crowd contributes to this archaic effect: the women have white caps, terminating in a point, with a pad of embroidery above flattened locks, and flying lappets, or long goffred caps for the fisher and salt-pit women, petticoats pleated in wide folds and wimples around the neck. The men have two totally different costumes: the farming people wear a short vest, a high collar, and a coloured handkerchief arranged as a shirt frill, which gives them the air of well-crested village cocks. The salt workers are dressed in the ancient Guérandais costume, the long white smock coming half-way down the leg;

the breeches white too, finished off with garters above the knee, and a three-cornered black hat over all, adorned with steel buckles and knots of coloured velvet twist. This hat

is worn upon the head in several different ways. The married men wear it "battle fashion," across, like the gendarmes; widowers and bachelors turn the points in other ways. All this assemblage spreads

itself about the venerable streets, and an hour later comes together again on the race course, about half a mile from the town, on an immense plain bounded only by the horizon.

From the stands, the view is marvellous. In the background is the sea, green and flecked with white foam: nearer are the steeples of Le Croisic, of the town of Batz, and the salt-pits sparkling and white under the sunshine, in the gleaming trenches of the marshes. The crowd arrives from all sides across the fields. The high white caps appear above the hedges; the lads advance in bands, arm in arm, and singing in their hoarse voices. Song and movement are alike simple, primitive, almost barbarous. Without heeding the stares of the gentlemen in tall hats, the women who pass before us, a silk kerchief crossed over their wimples, have a composed and dignified bearing, and not the slightest affectation of coquetry. They have come to look on, to be sure; but not to be looked at. While waiting for the races to begin, all the people crowd together behind the stands, around the great sheds where waffles and sausages are fried in

full sunshine. At last comes the Guérandais band, surrounded by fresh groups of noisy singers, and there is an interruption to the drinking for a time. Every one rushes to obtain a good place for the coming sight, and in this overflow of people, scattering itself around the course, upon the edge of the ditches and the already harvested fields, the long white smock of the marsh-men, which appears to increase their size, makes them look from afar like Dominicans or *Prémontrés*. Indeed all this part of Brittany rather gives the impression of a vast convent. Even the work is carried on in silence. To reach Guérande, we had to pass through villages that were dumb notwithstanding the bustle of harvest, and everywhere upon the road, the foils and the beaters worked in measured time without the faintest excitement of word or song. To-day, however, the waffles, the cider, and the sausages have loosened the tongues of the lads, and all along the course there is a cheerful hubbub.

Guérande races are of two sorts: first there is the townspeople race; one of those country steeple-chases, such as we have all seen dozens of times. A few green race-cards

stuck in the hats, some vehicles, few and far between ranged in the enclosure, a display of parasols and smart dresses,—the whole an imitation of Paris; all this cannot be interesting for us; but the mule races, and those of the horses of the country, we found singularly amusing. It is the very deuce to put into line these little Breton mules, owning a double share of obstinacy. The music, the shouts, the motley of the stands, frighten them. There is sure to be one that carries his rider the wrong way of the course, and to bring him back takes time. The young fellows who mount them wear flat caps of the brightest scarlet, a similar vest, great breeches, wide and floating, legs and feet bare; no saddles, only bridles, which the mules pull on one side with the most marked ill-will. At length they are off. They can be distinguished in the plain, dashing along at full gallop. The red jackets are terribly shaken, and the straightened and strained legs endeavour to keep the animals within the line traced by the ropes. At the turn of the course more than one rider is left rolling upon the grass of the enclosure; but the race is not interrupted for this. The marsh-man,

owner of the animal, darts forth at once, leaves his unfortunate jockey to pick himself up as best he can, and, still arrayed in his long smock, which he has not had time to throw off, himself bestrides his beast. There

are disdainful smiles on the stands, but the Breton crowd, perched up in the trees, ranged along the edges of the ditches, stamps with joy, and utters energetic cries of delight. Each man naturally pins his faith on the nags of his own parish. The people from Batz, Saillé, le Pouliguen, Escoublac, Piriac, watch for their compatriots on the way, cheer

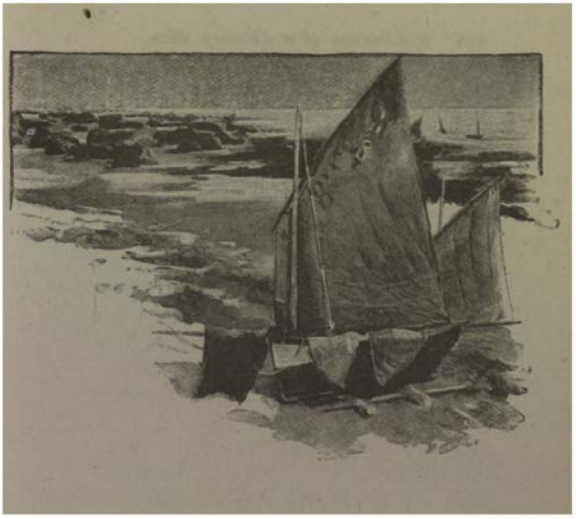
on the riders, and even leave the ranks, to whack the mules with friendly blows from hats and handkerchiefs. Even the white caps all suddenly rise up, fluttering like butterflies in the sea breeze, to watch Jean-Marie Mahé or Jean-Marie Madec, or some other Jean-Marie, go by. After the mules, come the horses and mares of the country, a shade less obstinate than the mules, a little less wild, but brimful of ardour all the same, and valiantly striving to win the race.

Their resounding hoofs tear up the ground of the track; and while they race, one can see far beyond them, upon a sea tossed by a terrific wind, a fisher sail making with difficulty for le Croisic. This neighbourhood imparts to the sight before us a remarkable grandeur; the horses and the vehicles rolling homewards along the road, the groups scattered over the plain, all stand out against a green and restless background, a horizon full of life and immensity.

As we returned to Guérande, the evening was beginning to close in. Illuminations were in course of preparation, coloured lanterns hung in the great trees of the promenades, fireworks were arranged in the

church square, and there was a platform below the ramparts for those who played the bagpipes. But behold, a fine drizzling rain, sharp and cold as sleet, came to spoil the festivities. Every one took refuge in the inns, in front of which stood carts and vehicles, unharnessed and dripping, with their shafts in the air. For an hour, the town is silent; then the same bands as before stream down the dark streets singing. The tall caps and the little green shawls venture out in couples. There has been some talk of dancing a *branle*, and dance it they will, notwithstanding the rain. Yes! indeed! they will! Soon all this youthfulness settles itself down right and left in the low rooms of the taverns. Some dance to the music of the bagpipes, some to an accompaniment of singing "*son des bouches*," as they say here. The boards tremble, the lamps are coated with dust, and the same slow and melancholy refrain is heard droning ponderously over the whole place. During this time, the carriages and carts are slipping away through all the five gates of the town. The old manor houses are shut once more, and the flowering bushes which adorn the

ramparts, seem in the night to increase, to mingle, to become confounded in one vast tangle, as the enchanted shrubs, at the touch of the fairy's wand, surrounded the castle where lay the Sleeping Beauty.



A VISIT TO THE ISLE OF HOUAT.

A LOVELY summer sunlight, equal and limpid, had just risen over the bay of Quiberon, as we set foot on the pilot boat destined to convey us to the Island of Houat. The breeze, always fresh from some point of

the compass on this vast horizon of sea, filled the sail, and drove us before it straight to our destination, merely skimming the waves and curling them with close following shivers.

In the distance, coasts disclosed themselves, some sandy beach, or some white house suddenly catching the sunlight, gleaming between the varied blue of the waves, and the monotonous blue of the sky, over which floated only those light, fringed, feathery clouds, that the sailors here call "mare's-tails," and which foretell a smart breeze before nightfall.

The crossing seemed short.

Nothing is more uniform in appearance than the sea in fine weather; the waves succeed each other in equal rhythm, break against the boat in frothy murmurs, swell, dip, moved by an unquiet heaviness in which lurks the latent storm; and yet, nothing is really more varied. Everything assumes an enormous importance upon this surface endowed with life, and movement. Seawards are vessels of all kinds, the mail-packet for Belle-Isle, passing afar off, its smoke like

a plume; fishing boats with sails white or tanned, shoals of porpoises rolling upon the water and cleaving it with their sharp fins; then rocky islets, from whence rise tumultuously flocks of sea-gulls, or some troop of cormorants with their great wings,—strong for hovering and for flight,—which mark them as birds of prey.

In passing, we run close by the Teignouse light-house, perched upon a rock; and although our pace is great, we have a very clear vision of the reef, and the two human lives upon it. At the moment when we pass by, one of the men, his blouse all filled by the wind, is descending the little perpendicular brass ladder, which serves as an external staircase, on to the islet. His companion, seated in a cleft of the rock, is mournfully fishing; the sight of these two figures, so small against the surrounding immensity, the white stone work of the light-house, the lantern, at this hour pale in the daylight, the weights of the great steam bell which tolls on foggy nights, all these quickly seen details, were enough to give us a striking impression of this exile

in mid-ocean, and of the life of these keepers, shut up for weeks together, in this hollow and sonorous tower of sheet-iron, where the voices of sea and wind reverberate with such fury, that the men are obliged to shout in each other's ears, to make themselves heard.

Once the light-house rounded, the Isle of Houat begins to appear, little by little, showing above the swell of the sea its rocky soil, on which the sun throws a mirage of vegetation, tints as of ripe harvest, and the velvet bloom of grassy meadows.

As we get nearer, the aspect changes, the real ground appears, wild and desolate, burnt up by the sun and sea, bristling with frowning heights; on the right, a dismantled and abandoned fortress, on the left, a grey windmill which gauges for us the speed of the land breezes, a few very low roofs grouped around their clock tower; all far apart, gloomy, and silent. One might suppose the place to be uninhabited, if a few flocks scattered upon the slopes of the rugged valleys of the island, were not to be seen, wandering in the distance,

or lying down or grazing upon the wild and scanty vegetation.

Here and there, creeks of sand describe bright and soft-edged curves amid the desola-

tion of the rocks. It is in one of these creeks that we disembark, not without difficulty, for at low tide, the shore is too shallow for the approach of the boat, and we are forced to land on wet slippery stones to which cling the long green locks of the seaweed ; seaweed dilated or uncurled by the water, but at this

moment massed together in heavy sticky lumps on which the foot slips at every step. At length after many efforts, we gain the top of the high cliffs which command the whole near horizon.

In the clear atmosphere which seems to bring the shores nearer, the view is admirable. Here is the steeple of le Croisic, that of Bourg-de-Batz, some ten or twelve sea-leagues distant, and all the jagged coast line of Morbihan, Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuiz, the rivers of Vannes and Auray, Locmariaquer, Plouharmel, Carnac, the Bourg-de-Quiberon, and the little hamlets belonging to it, that are scattered along the whole length of the peninsula. From the opposite shore, the dark line of Belle-Isle steals out towards the wild sea, and the houses of Palais gleam in an opening. But if the perspective is enlarged, the view of Houat is for the time being entirely lost to us. The belfry, the fort, the windmill, have all disappeared in the inequalities of the undulating ground, as wildly contorted as the surrounding waves. We, however, directed our steps toward the village by a tortuous

pathway, protected by the treacherous little Breton walls, made of flat stones, and full of twists and turns.

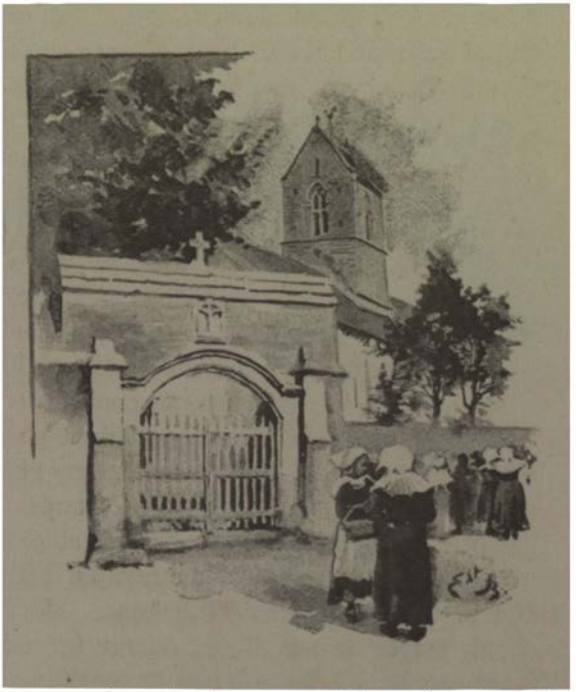
As we walked along, we noticed the flora of the island, wonderful for a mere rock beaten by every wind of heaven ; the lilies of Houat, double and sweet-scented like our own, large mallows, trailing roses, sea-pinks, the faint and delicate perfume of which is in harmony with the thin note of the grey lark, whereof the island is full. Fields of potatoes and freshly cut corn lie around us, but on every piece of fallow-land, the moor, the dreary moor, hard and bristling, advances, climbs, and sticks, yellow flowers peeping out amid its thorns. At our approach the cattle turned aside ; the cows accustomed to the flat caps and hats of Morbihan, followed us for a long time with their great motionless eyes. Everywhere we came upon cattle, scattered or grazing in groups, and always free from shackles or superintendence.

At last, lying in a fold of the ground, sheltered from the storms and the sea spray, appeared the village, with its low and

wretched roofs huddled together, as if to make head against the wind, and separated not by the usual narrow streets, the straight lines of which might be a pathway for the tempests, but by crossways, or little squares, capriciously disposed, and at the present time of year serving as threshing floors for the harvest.

Half wild horses, of a breed somewhat recalling that of the Camarguais, turn, two or three yoked together, in the cramped spaces of these unequal circles, treading the grain, and sending the dust of it, flying up in the sunshine. A woman guides them, a wisp of straw in her hand; other women, armed with pitchforks, turn the corn over towards the circle of the threshing ground. There is nothing striking about their costumes: poor faded garments devoid of shape, yellow kerchiefs sheltering tanned and sallow faces; but the scene itself is of the most picturesque primitiveness. From thence rise the neigh of the horses, the rustle of the straw, and clear voices, in which ring the harsh guttural syllables of the Breton speech.

Such as it is, this poor Morbihan village makes you think of some African encamp-



ment; there is the same stifling air, vitiated by the dungheaps accumulated at the very thresholds, the same familiar companionship between the inhabitants and their beasts, the

same isolation of a little group of creatures in the midst of a vast solitude; moreover, the doors are low, the windows narrow; indeed, on the walls facing the sea there are none. One feels distinctly, that here is poverty combating the unfriendly elements.

The women toil wearily to get in the harvests, and occupy themselves with the cattle; the men spend their lives in fishing, a work of danger. At the present time, all are at sea, except an old fellow, shaking with fever, whom we find sitting at his rope-maker's wheel, and the miller, who is not a native of the island and is paid monthly by the community, and lastly the *M. le Curé*, the highest personage in the Isle of Houat, and the very pith of its originality. Here all power centres in the priest, just as in the captain of a ship at sea. To his sacerdotal authority, he adds that of his administrative functions. He is deputy mayor in the village, referee for the fisher people; it is he who has the supervision of the military works, forts or fortlets, which have been built upon the island, and which in time of peace are unprovided with even a man in charge. Should a dispute arise

among the maritime population, over a lobster pot, or the division of a haul of fish, behold *M. le Curé* acting as justice of the peace. Should there be a little too much convivial uproar at the tavern on Sunday evening, quickly he winds a tri-coloured scarf round his cassock, and on this occasion fulfils the functions of village constable.

It is not very long since he was wont to descend to even more petty employments. He had the monopoly of all drinks, which he caused to be served out by a Sister through a wicket. He also kept the key of the common oven, in which every household bakes its bread. These were the precautions of exile; the necessary rules for ship provisions, brought from outside to this sea-girt island, left like a vessel to the mercy of the waves.

For three or four years past, the ancient customs have been slightly modified; but the principles of them are still in force, and the actual *Curé* of the island, a vigorous and intelligent man, appeared to us quite capable of enforcing respect for his multiple authority. He lives near the church, in a modest par-

sonage, which by the presence of two poplars, a superb fig tree, a flower garden, and a few wandering hens, seems to carry us back to the heart of the mainland.

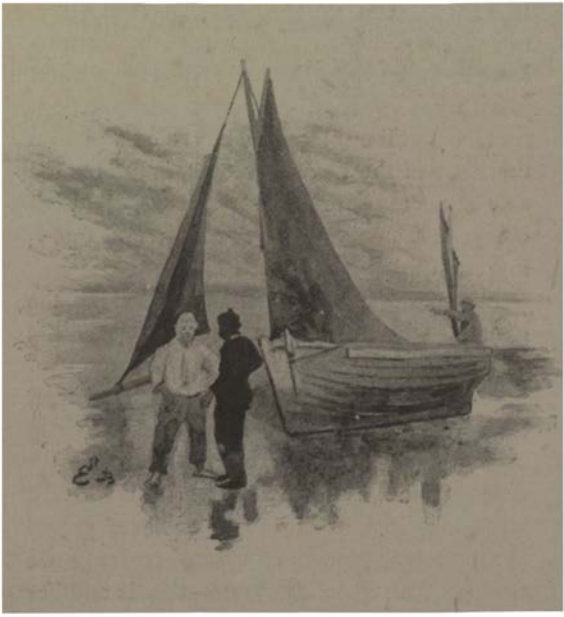
By the side of the *Curé's* house, is the mixed school for boys and girls, in charge of Sisters, who also undertake to distribute to all these poor folk, medicines, kindly care, and advice.

In the Sisters' house, too, terminates the submarine telegraph that unites Houat with Belle-Isle, and the continent. It is a Sister who receives and transmits the messages; and in passing she may be seen behind the window-pane, her well-starched cap bent over the electric needle. Further information, still more curious, about the Isle of Houat and its population, was given to us in the little white-washed dining-room, with all its beams visible, to which *M. le Curé* brought us, and where he made us sit down. There are no poor at Houat. A communal fund supplies all that is necessary. Fish abounds upon the coast, the fishermen go to le Croisic or Auray to sell it, and always sell it well; but the absence of a safe anchorage on this

rock-bound coast prevents the people of Houat from being perfectly happy. It is by no means uncommon, in rough weather, for the smacks to be obliged to put out to sea, to seek a better shelter although at the risk of greater dangers. Sometimes, in the harbour even, badly protected as it is by a short jetty of the most primitive construction, accidents take place. The sole ambition therefore of the *Curé* of Houat, is to obtain a safe anchorage for the seven smacks which compose the fleet of the country; and dwelling upon this hope, we left him.

In quitting the village, we passed by the church, where the sea reflects upon the window panes a changing blue; for a moment we halt in the little cemetery, silent, uncared for, the rare black crosses in the vast horizon around us, seeming like so many masts in harbour; and as we wonder at the small number of inscriptions, or of enclosed graves in a churchyard which must be of great age, we are told that up to last year,—this is another effect of the maritime customs of the Island of Houat,—it was usual to turn up the ground where chance might direct, and so to render

to the earth again, the anonymous dead; just as in long voyages, they are consigned to the passing waves.



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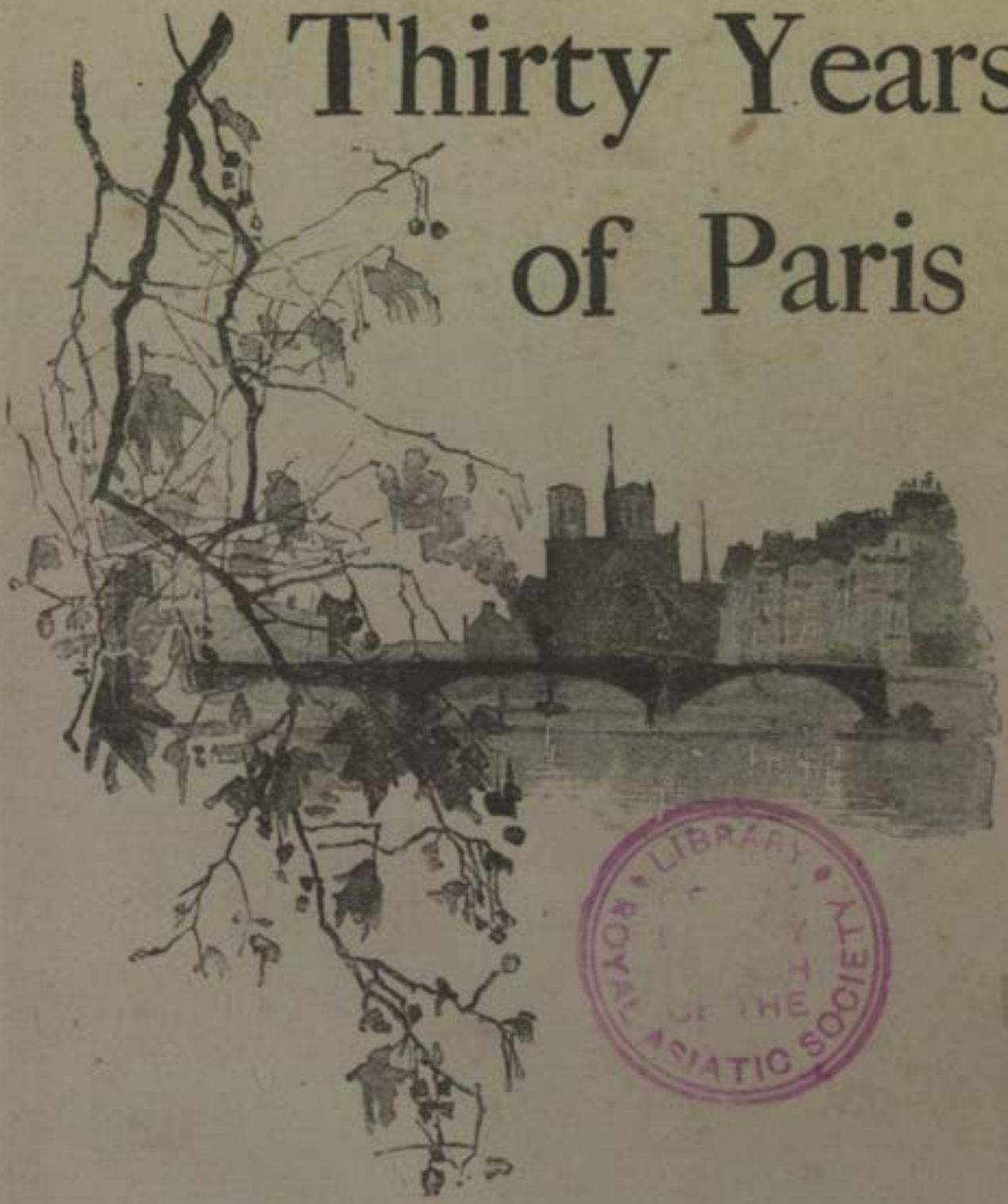

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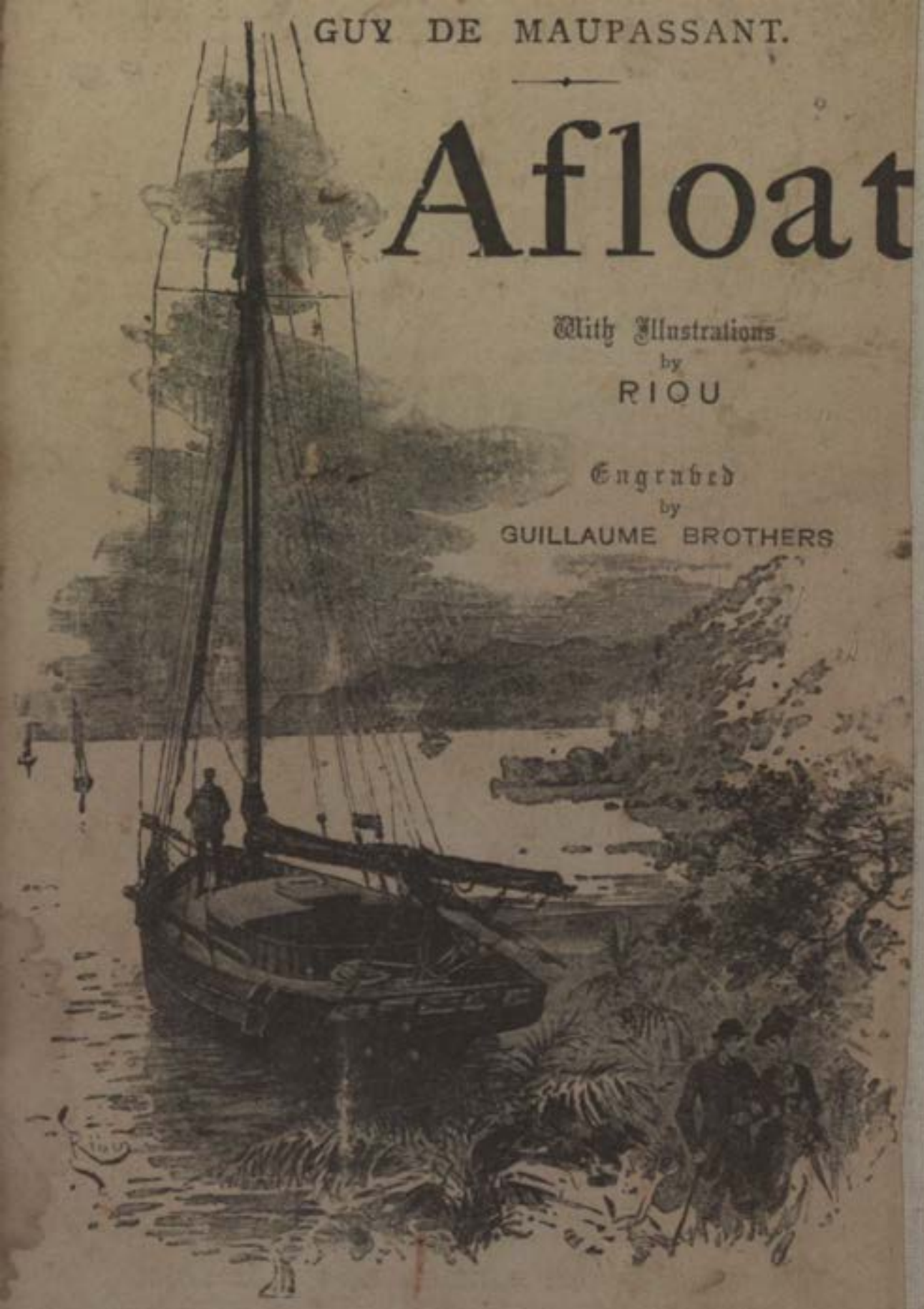

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